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The Detective

in Rags



BY
DR. NOEL DUNBAR.

AUSTIN MARKHAM WENDED HIS WAY ALONG THE HIGHWAY, STAFF IN HAND, LIKE A VAGABOND OF THE ROAD.

The Detective in Rags;

OR,

THE GRIM SHADOWER.

A Romance of New York Secret Service Life.

BY DOCTOR NOEL DUNBAR.

AUTHOR OF "THE TRUE-HEART PARDS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAMP.

A MAN stood gazing upon a grand home that was situated upon a lofty hill overlooking the majestic Hudson.

Ornamental grounds surrounded the elegant mansion, flower-beds here and there breaking the velvetsmoothness of the lawns, and statuary marking each curve of the winding roadway from the massive gateway to the marble steps at the front door, with here and there an arbor, a fountain sending its spray into the air, and in the background a forest of noble trees.

It was the abode of wealth and refinement, and picturesque in its beauty as a home, it was a spot in which one would believe that happiness alone could rest, with no carping cares, no struggles, no jealousies of life.

The sun was almost touching the western horizon, and its rays fell upon the villa, illuminating its windows like a fiery furnace, and tinting to a rosy hue the white marble walls.

The scene from the grounds was a superb one, for far down the river was the busy metropolis, the wall-like banks on the other shore rose dark and gloomy in the gathering evening shadows, and the waters of the Hudson were dotted with the white sails of scores of vessels.

"And this is his home?"

The words came from the lips of the man who stood at the gateway, his eyes drinking in the scene before him, and seemingly enraptured with its beauty.

The villa, the grounds surrounding it, the Hudson, the dark banks of the Jersey shore, the distant city, the sail-dotted river, all fell under his vision, as slowly he turned from one beauty to another, until he uttered the words:

"And this is his home?"

A tall form, with massive frame, bent seemingly with the weight of years, the man stood in the shadow of the gateway.

Upon his back was slung a pack, which, from his ragged, forlorn appearance, contained all his worldly goods, and in one hand he held a staff, the end bent like a shepherd's crook.

Bronzed-faced, gray-haired, with a long, flowing beard, matted and stained, his locks falling upon his stooping shoulders, his clothing worn and his slouch hat patched and limp, he might well have stood for a portrait of the Wandering Jew.

But his dark eyes had not lost their fire, his brow its intelligence, or the firm lips their character, though the world had been cruel and his lines in life had been cast in hard places.

"Well, I will go on, and see what may be my welcome.

"After a quarter of a century the past should be forgotten, methinks, memories should be buried, and blood should prove thicker than water.

"But soon I will know all."

So saying, he moved slowly toward the elegant house, following the winding driveway to the piazza-steps.

Upon the piazza, seated in easy-chairs were several persons, one a young man of twenty-two who held a cigar between his lips and at whose feet lay a large dog, a vicious-looking brute.

Another was a boy of sixteen, who was engaged in reading a novel, a third, a maiden of eighteen, lazily swinging to and fro in a hammock, and a fourth, a young girl of fourteen, a sweet-faced little beauty, who sat upon the steps sketching the sleeping dog and his young master.

It was a family group, with one exception, that of the girl of fourteen, whose red gold curls and deep blue eyes showed that she was not near kindred to the other three, who were dark-haired, black-eyed and with a look of pride that was stamped upon their every feature.

As the tramp, for certainly such he seemed, approached the piazza steps he paused and asked:

"Is this the house of Colonel Alfred Markham?"

"Yes; what can you want here, Sir Tramp?" was the insolent response of the young man, while his dog, with something of his young master's spirit, awoke and growled viciously.

"I would like to speak with Colonel Markham," was the quiet response.

"I will tell you for him that he never gives tramps anything, so be off, for it will soon be dark and you are not a pleasant-looking creature to have about one's house after nightfall."

The eyes of the man flashed at this insult, while the young girl threw down her drawing and said:

"For shame Egbert, to speak to an old man thus."

"Go into the house, Alice, and I will see that my mother reproves you for this impertinence to me," sternly ordered the youth, and turning again to the intruder he said:

"Now, sir, be off, or I will set my dog upon you!"

"I do not fear you or your dog, boy, and I will not leave until I have spoken with your father," was the stern response.

"You had better go, old vagabond, for my brother means just what he says," the boy called out, throwing aside his book with the air of one who had found something of deeper interest.

"Yes, begone; for such as you have no right to degrade our home with your presence, and my brother will do right if he sets Nero upon you."

This from the lips of the beautiful maiden who was reclining in the hammock.

"You had better go, sir, for Nero is a bad brute, and if Egbert says the word he will spring upon you; so please go, and I will bring you a few dimes down to the gate, for I have some money of my own," urged the girl, who had not obeyed the young man's command to enter the house.

"Bless you, my child, but I came not here to beg of you, a stranger, for you are not of this brood, I can see; but I came to see Colonel Markham, and I propose to do so."

"That is your way, is it, you rascally old tramp! At him, Nero, and drive him off!"

With the words of the young man the huge dog gave a yelp and sprung toward the man; but, quick as he was, the young girl was quicker, and throwing herself upon him, she grasped his collar, while she cried, in a voice of anguish:

"Back, Nero! back, sir!"

But the huge dog dragged the girl with him in his furious attack, and sprung toward the man, who, stepping quickly backward, brought his staff around with a sweeping blow, which, glancing from the shaggy head of the dog, struck with a dull thud into the mass of red-gold curls of the young girl.

Instantly her hold upon the brute's collar was released and she fell upon the marble pave like one dead.

A cry of horror broke from the lips of the tramp, and was echoed by the young man, his brother and sister, while the freed dog made a spring at the throat of the intruder.

But the man had dropped his staff, and though the teeth of the brute sunk deep into his arm, with his disengaged hand he drew suddenly from the folds of his tattered coat a long-bladed knife, and buried it to the hilt in the body of the vicious animal.

A wild yelp and Nero dropped dead at the feet of the tramp, just as a gentleman, followed by a lady, ran out upon the piazza and cried:

"In God's name! what does all this mean?"

Ere reply could be given, the young man, maddened by the death of his favorite pet, the vicious Nero, seized the vagabond's staff, and, advancing upon him, cried out:

"I'll have your worthless life, old man!"

"Back, boy, and do not force me to kill my brother's son!" were the startling words that fell from the lips of the aged tramp.

CHAPTER II.

THE BROTHER'S LEGACY.

LONG years before the scene depicted in the foregoing chapter, a small party stood around an open grave, performing the last sad rites to the dead.

The final words were said, the dirt fell ominously upon the coffin, the village grave-digger had done his duty, and the party turned away from the melancholy scene to return homeward.

One of the carriages, that had waited near, rolled away bearing four persons, two of them young men, so strangely resembling each other that it did not have to be told that they were twin brothers, the others being an aged matron and a man of middle age, with the unmistakable look of a country attorney.

Into a decaying gateway the carriage turned, and thence along a weed-grown drive to a rambling old structure which, for several generations, had been the home of the Grayhurst family, until at last it was to descend to another name, by the death of old Guy Grayhurst, who had inherited it as an only child.

A wild reckless boy he had run off to sea, and for years he was believed dead; but having been seen in foreign seas, as captain of a vessel, his father, when dying, left him the estate, should he ever return, and not doing so it was to go to charity.

But when verging on half a century of years, Captain Guy Grayhurst ran up the East River one day and anchored his trim brig in the little haven surrounded by the broad lands of Grayhurst Grange, and took possession of his inheritance.

He was a stern-faced man, seemingly at war with the world, and it was his pleasure to move into the old homestead, all dilapidated as it was, and make it his home.

He secured a couple of old servants as cook

and housekeeper, engaged a coachman, and made only such needful repairs as were necessary for his comfort, living only in one wing, of half a dozen rooms, while four times that number were vacant and remained closed.

Another strange idea of the old sailor was to dismiss his crew, all excepting his aged boatswain, and anchoring the brig in the cove, there to let her remain, the solitary seaman staying on board as a keeper.

A year after his arrival at the homestead, Captain Grayhurst received a letter, telling him of the death of a favorite cousin, one, it was said, he had loved when he was a mere boy, and for love of whom, when she had married, for she was several years his senior, he had run off to sea to heal his broken heart.

Be that as it may, she had lost her eldest children, her husband had died, and when she felt that she too must join the great majority, she had written a letter to Guy Grayhurst, asking him to take care of her two boys, twin brothers, and whom she must leave penniless and alone in the world.

The boys were sent for, and thus it was that Austin and Alfred Markham came to live in Grayhurst Grange, when they were in their sixteenth year.

It was not a cheerful place for the boys to live in, with the stern old sea-captain, the grim-faced servants, and the stately coachman; but their room was comfortable, they lived on the best the country afforded, books there were in plenty to read, and horses, guns and dogs they had at their will.

A year after their coming Captain Grayhurst got for Alfred Markham an appointment at West Point, and a tutor was secured to teach Austin, who remained at the Grange.

Thus the years passed by, until Alfred graduated with honor, and came home on a long leave-of-absence before entering upon the arduous duties of a soldier in the field.

He was warmly welcomed by Austin, and also the old captain, and the second day after his arrival, his brother drove him over to Placide Place, a right royal old estate, the home of a wealthy New York merchant, who lived there with his only child, Estelle, and full a score of servants.

Though living within a couple of miles of each other, Austin Markham had not met his beautiful neighbor, for Estelle Placide was beautiful, until he was returning from the city one day in his little yacht, when a squall upset a pleasure-boat near him, and his nerve and promptness were the means of saving the entire party from drowning.

It was Merchant Placide, his daughter and some of her school friends from the city, and, owing their lives to Austin Markham, from that day they became friends, a friendship that upon the part of the young man and Estelle ripened into warmest love.

The acknowledged heir of the strange old recluse, Captain Guy Grayhurst, Mr. Placide raised no objection to the intimacy existing between Austin and his daughter, for the old sailor was said to be fabulously wealthy, and the two became engaged, and the young man was most happy in driving his brother Alfred over to see his lady-love when he returned from West Point.

From the moment the cadet saw Estelle Placide he loved her, and, though he tried to hide it from Austin, it was of no avail, for the latter realized it, and it pained him deeply; but he loved Estelle too dearly to give her up, and he felt that he had the prior claim upon her.

One night a few weeks after Alfred's return, while a severe storm was raging, the bell on the anchored brig swung violently, and all was at once excitement in the mansion.

Austin sprang out of bed, threw on his storm-suit and ran down to the shore, sprung into a skiff and rowed out to the brig.

Arriving there he found a lantern, and beheld poor old Boatswain Joe lying dead by the brig's bell, his hand grasping the rope, and the blood streaming from a knife-thrust in the heart.

Some one had boarded the vessel and attacked him; but who?

Soon after Captain Grayhurst, accompanied by Alfred Markham and the coachman came off in a boat, and the old sailor was deeply moved to see his shipmate dead, and in a deep, quivering voice he vowed to hunt down his murderer.

But the shock, and the exposure proved too much for the old sailor, and, a few days after Boatswain Joe had been laid in his grave, the master of Grayhurst Grange took to his bed and began to steadily sink away.

A few days before his death he called Alfred to his bedside and, what followed no one knew, though the old housekeeper said there was a stormy scene between them, for while at West Point the young cadet had squandered money and gambled heavily, and the old sailor had paid many a dollar to keep him out of trouble, while, just prior to Boatswain Joe's being murdered, Alfred had gone to New York and gotten into financial straits there which his guardian was again forced to help him out of.

Such were the rumors of the old housekeeper, told in the kitchen, and to which she added:

"And yet the master lets that boy rule him, from some strange reason I cannot understand; but I guess he'll leave Master Alfred all the property."

And at last Captain Guy Grayhurst went the way of all flesh, dying in grim silence, with merely the grasp of a hand to those about him.

And over in the village churchyard, in the plot where lay his ancestors, he was laid away, a few neighbors alone going to see him buried, among them Merchant Placide and Estelle.

Back to Grayhurst Grange rolled the old family carriage, containing the two brothers, the lawyer and the housekeeper, and they gathered in the library that night to hear the will of the reclusive sailor read.

The lawyer took from his pocket a large key, and in the presence of the two brothers, the housekeeper and servants opened a large iron box.

From it he took the will, and seating himself by the table unfolded it, while he said:

"You are aware, young gentlemen, that it was my late partner who drew up this will, but Captain Grayhurst left it for me to read to you after his death, requesting that it should be done as soon after his burial as possible."

Alfred and Austin Markham bowed, and the lawyer began the reading of the will in dead silence.

He had read but a short while when he paused, seemed surprised, glanced at Austin and continued:

"Giving no reason, that others may know, and leaving it for Austin Markham to understand, as he does, why I took out him off with the sum of five thousand dollars, I do bequeath herewith to his brother, Alfred Markham, my entire estate, excepting the above amount that is to be paid in cash to his brother, and the several sums I do give to those who have faithfully served me in my household."

Here followed the names of the housekeeper and servants, with the sum in cash left to each, and the will ended, bequeathing to Alfred Markham an estate and other properties valued at a million dollars.

Austin Markham was as white as a corpse, while his brother's face was flushed with excitement, and he said generously:

"Come, brother, this is all wrong, for you have been here at home and carefully cared for Uncle Grayhurst, while I have been away, caused him much uneasiness and drawn largely upon his pocket, so I will share with you equally the fortune."

"I thank you, Alfred, but not a dollar will I accept, not even the money he has left me."

"I have a few hundreds of my own, a good education, I am full of strength, health and pluck, and I will carve out my own fortune; but it cuts me to the heart to feel that my uncle, for we have ever called him so, died with a grudge against me, which I, for the life of me, cannot fathom."

"Mr. Attorney, will you be good enough to tell me who are the witnesses to that will, for they may be able to tell me what I had done to deserve this?"

"Boatswain Joe is one, and your uncle's physician is another."

"His last physician, sir?"

"No; Doctor Weed."

"And both are dead," groaned Austin Markham.

"Yes, sir, as is also my law partner, who drew up the will."

Austin Markham stood in silence a moment, and then he said:

"So be it. I am content, and brother Alfred, I congratulate you; but fortune seems strangely against me, for my guardian has left a charge against me which I cannot refute against dead lips, and Doctor Weed was murdered one night in his office, and Boatswain Joe's fate you know, while Lawyer Sykes disappeared mysteriously, as I suppose you are aware, and not a link remains which I can find to prove I did not deserve this."

"I cared not for riches, I would have been content to have nothing left me; but to be cut off with a few thousand, and a stigma that I deserve it, and you to get all, is a bitter blow indeed."

"I do not envy you, Alfred; but I do feel deeply the blow I get from out the grave."

So saying, Austin Markham turned and left the room, and ten minutes after he was on his way to Placide Place to tell his misfortunes to Estelle.

Merchant Placide was pacing the piazza, enjoying the moonlight night, as he rode up, and he muttered to himself:

"The boy has heard his uncle's will read, and comes to tell us the good news, and I'll wager, after all the old sailor heard of Alfred's wild life, he's cut him off with a dollar, and left Austin all."

"Now I can borrow from Austin what I need to tide me over, and it comes just in time to save me from ruin."

Turning to the young man as he ascended the steps with a quick step, he led him into the library, and he saw that his handsome face was stern, strangely so where it had always worn a look of joy.

He had expected to see Austin sad, for he

knew that he had loved well his strange old guardian; but the look he then wore surprised him.

But he was quickly told all that had happened, and stood grim and silent, as Austin continued:

"I am now, as you know, Mr. Placide, a poor man; but I will leave home, or the place that has been my home, and before very long lay the foundation for a self-made fortune."

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Markham, and think it best that you should go away to seek your fortune, for you would not wish to live upon your brother, I know; but, until you are able to offer my daughter a home, and the comforts she has been accustomed to, I must consider that there is no engagement between you."

Austin Markham was dazed, and a hot reply arose to his lips; but checking it, he asked calmly:

"Is this the desire of Miss Placide also?"

"It matters not, sir, for it is my wish."

"I demand to see Miss Placide before I go, sir."

"Come to-morrow, then, and you shall see her."

Austin bowed and departed, and his horse was ridden hard on the way back to the Grange.

Declining to see even his brother, he set to work packing up his things, and before he retired was all ready to depart from the place that had been his home.

He greeted his brother pleasantly at breakfast, again declined to share with him his legacy, and informed him that he would leave home that day, departing in his own sailboat, which would bring a good price in New York.

After breakfast he rode over to Placide Place, and, contrary to his usual custom, the merchant was at home on a week day.

He greeted the young man coldly, and told him that Estelle would see him.

She came into the room, very pale, very calm and cold, and told him firmly, as it was her father's wish, their engagement was at an end.

He bowed and took his leave, saying in a voice full of deep emotion:

"Some day, Estelle, we will meet again; but farewell, and may happiness alone attend you."

Had he seen that slender form sink in a swoon upon the floor, as he left—had he seen the smile of triumph upon the face of the merchant, he would have known that there was something beyond his fathoming that sent him out hopeless into the world.

But, stern-faced, heart-crushed, he went forth to battle with the world, a grasp of his brother's hand in farewell, as he stepped upon his little yacht, a godspeed from the servants, that was all.

And behind him he left his brother to win Estelle Placide as his wife, his money to tide the merchant over his misfortunes, and Alfred Markham and his bride to move to the grand home upon the Hudson, where, twenty-five years after, he came to his door that pleasant afternoon to be called a tramp, and ordered off as a vagabond.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECOND FAREWELL.

THE scene that met the gaze of those, who had come out upon the piazza, of the elegant Hudson River home of the Markhams, was a thrilling one indeed.

The vagabond was Austin Markham, the gentleman on the piazza was Colonel Alfred Markham, his brother, the lady, his wife.

Behind the latter, in the doorway, stood the wife, a sad-faced, lovely woman, white as marble, and as cold, as she gazed upon the scene.

Her children were before her, her daughter and younger son upon the steps, glaring upon the vagabond, her elder son, he who had brought on all the trouble by his insolence and inhumanity, standing in a threatening manner, the staff in hand ready to strike, and near, lying unconscious upon the cold pavement, was the golden-haired girl who had fallen under the blow of Austin Markham, the blow meant for the vicious brute that lay dead at his feet.

At bay, his knife drawn, stood the man who had returned after long years, returned to receive such a welcome, to be an actor in such a scene.

Strangely alike were the brothers as they thus faced each other, though one wore stylish clothes, the other was in rags, though the hair of one was nearly white, his face furrowed with care and suffering, the hair of the other only tinged with gray, and his face devoid of the lines that bitter struggling with the world will bring.

"Austin Markham!" came in quivering accents from the lips of Colonel Markham, as the words of his brother to his son, as well as that unmistakable face told him who he was.

"Yes, Alfred, I am your brother Austin, returned after all these years of wanderings, of sorrows, sufferings, foot-sore, weary, to claim shelter at your hands; but, great God! have I come to stain my hands with the life of that beautiful child?"

"If so, it had indeed been better that I forever remained away."

As he spoke he sprung forward and kneeling by the side of the little girl, raised her gently in his arms, while he eagerly looked for the wound he had given her, for her tresses were stained with blood.

"It was a cruel blow, for I meant it for that devilish brute. See, the scalp is cut to the bone, but there is no fracture, thank God, and she is only stunned. See! she opens her eyes, she revives, and I am not her murderer!"

The eyes of the young girl opened just then, and she gazed into the bearded, rough, but earnest face bending over her, and, passing her hand across her forehead she smiled and said softly:

"You did not mean to strike me, I know; but, did Nero bite you, sir?"

"No, no, child! But, Heaven be praised, you are not severely hurt; a mere flesh-wound, and one which will soon be all right, if that gaping idiot would only run for a doctor to dress it," and the uncomplimentary allusion was to Egbert Markham, who turned to his father, who had just dispatched his second son, Mercer, to send a servant for the family physician and asked in his insolent way:

"Father, is that old tramp your brother?"

Suddenly the white-faced lady glided forward, she that had been in the long ago Estelle Placide, and her eyes blazed as she said:

"Egbert Markham, don't you dare to so speak of that man, for he is in rags and a vagabond, no child of mine shall insult him and still call me mother!"

Egbert started back with amazement and alarm, for never before had he seen his sad-faced mother show such feeling, and, cowering beneath her gaze, he slunk away, while she continued, addressing Austin Markham:

"Give Alice to me, sir, and I will care for her, while you must come into the house and Alfred will look to your wants—Ah! there is blood on your arm! After all that vicious dog bit you!"

"It is nothing, Mrs. Markham, I assure you, to one who has received the knocks about the world that I have. I thank you for your sympathy and for your invitation to enter your elegant home; but I am not fit to cross its threshold, for I am a tramp, a vagabond, one who wandered from afar to come back here and see your face and Alfred's—to see your children, before I laid down to rest from life's struggles."

"I have come, I have seen you both, and I am content to go my way once more alone."

"Farewell!"

He raised his tattered hat with an old-time grace and elegance that ill became his rags, took the hand of little Alice as she stood half-supported by Mrs. Markham, and pressing it to his lips, turned slowly toward his brother, who stood like a statue, gazing upon him as though fascinated, and unable to look away and break the spell.

"Farewell, Alfred; some day we will meet again!"

They were the same words he had uttered to Estelle Placide twenty-five years before, and she shuddered as she heard them again and thought of that meeting, and that now they were addressed to his brother, her husband.

And Alfred Markham—stern, strong man that he was—shuddered, too, and with an effort called out:

"Stay, Austin, my brother, stay! You must not go hence in anger."

The man turned quickly, while he said:

"Anger? Did I go in anger years ago when I lost a fortune and the idol of my heart?"

"No; I go in peace—farewell!"

He took up his staff and quickly strode away, soon disappearing in the gathering gloom of night as he wended his way down toward the river shore.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW DETECTIVE.

WHEN Austin Markham left the lordly home of his brother, his heart was so full of aching pain that he heeded not the suffering from the teeth of the dog, which was by no means slight, as the wounds were severe.

Walking along the gravel drive to the gate, he there turned and looked back at the mansion, in which lights were now visible in the windows, and forms seen moving quickly about.

As he stood there a vehicle came swiftly along, and, shrinking back in the shadow of the massive gateway, he saw it turn into the grounds, nearly brushing him as it did so, and continue on its rapid way up to the mansion.

"It is the doctor, and I will wait and know the result," he muttered.

As patiently as a sentinel, taking his stand upon his post, he stepped alongside one of the stone pillars, and waited.

A half-hour passed, an hour had nearly gone by, and yet he stood motionless, seemingly oblivious of all about him, as his thoughts were in the past.

Then there came the rattle of wheels, and the vehicle was on its return.

He started at the sound, and thrusting his hand into his bosom waited.

As the horse reached the gate he stepped out before him, saying simply:

"Halt, sir, for I would speak with you!"

"Halt a footpad?" cried the doctor, attempting to urge his horse forward.

"No! I am no footpad, but I would detain you a moment."

"How is the little girl?"

His strong hand had seized the reins, and the horse was held firmly as he spoke.

"Ah! I was told that she was struck by a tramp. Are you he?" said the physician, calmly, as he saw that the man held the advantage.

"Yes, I struck her, but God knows I would not have harmed her for the world. Is her wound at all dangerous?"

"No, though it barely escaped being so."

"I am glad to know this, sir; but now tell me—who is she?"

"Her name is Alice Victor, and she is a ward of Colonel Markham."

"I see. Now be good enough to dress my arm, doctor, for that vicious brute that I struck at, when I hit the brave girl, has torn it badly."

"Did you strike at a dog?"

"I did, and it seems they told you not so, only that I was a tramp?"

"So they said."

"Who said so?"

"Mr. Egbert Markham, and his father as well."

"So consider me then, sir, and be good enough to cauterize and dress these teeth-wounds," and the man bared his muscular arm to the view of the doctor, who beheld it by the lantern, for one was on either side of his buggy.

"Those are indeed ugly wounds, and I advise you to go on to the village at once and have them looked to."

"My way does not lead to the village, and I request you to dress the wounds."

"I really have no time now, for I have a very sick patient awaiting me."

"Bah! you are like all the rest, though your calling should cause you to feel for one in distress."

"Here, take this purse of gold and dress my arm," and he contemptuously tossed a purse in the bottom of the buggy.

"You cannot have come by this gold honestly, so I will not touch it, but drive on and inform the authorities that—"

"Hold! I offered you gold, and you fear to touch it because it might be stolen."

"Now, sir, I'll give you lead, and that very quickly, if you do not at once dress my arm."

"Come, sir, to work, or take the consequences!"

The man's voice rung as he uttered the words, and a pistol looked squarely into the physician's face.

"Hold, my man, for I will do as you say, only put up that weapon," cried the alarmed doctor.

"Ah, you will do from fear what you refused for humanity's sake, and even for gold that you deemed polluted by robbery."

"Come, do your duty, and do it well, for I am no child to deceive by slighting your work."

Holding his arm out before the physician, he wrenched the lantern off with a sudden twist of his wrist and held it so that the light fell full upon the wound.

The doctor was a cool man in his professional duties; but now he had to deal with one who was his master, and to perform his duty under circumstances he had never before been placed in, and he was a trifle nervous in spite of himself.

But he knew those dark eyes were upon him, and he did his work well and skillfully, and remarked admiringly, as the man never winced under the pain he could not but suffer:

"You have nerve, at least."

"That is a quality no man should be without," was the contemptuous reply.

"But you have finished?"

"Yes."

"Keep that gold then, for it is no worse than any that Alfred Markham may have paid you. Good-night," and stepping back as he spoke, Austin Markham chirped to the restive horse, that started off quickly, and he was left standing alone in the gateway.

Turning once more toward the mansion, he said aloud:

"After twenty-five long years, such was my welcome in yonder home."

"So be it, we will meet again, some day."

With these words he strode swiftly along the highway for a short distance, until coming to a path leading down toward the shore he took it, and springing into a boat that was there, sculled swiftly out toward a small sloop that lay at anchor a short distance out in the river.

It was an humble-looking craft of ten tons' burden, and the mainsail was up, for the wind was light.

There appeared to be no one on the little craft and, springing on board, he made fast the boat's painter to the iron traveler, hoisted the jib, hauled up the anchor, and taking the tiller sailed down the river.

That he was not acting aimlessly the manner in which he held the craft on her way proved; and yet, he seemed lost in deep reverie, which

he broke with an effort, and turning, fixed his eyes upon the distant mansion of his twin brother, which now loomed up grandly, all alight as it was.

Suddenly, as he looked, a form stole out of the little cabin, then another, and in an instant they had thrown themselves upon the helmsman, while a third man appeared in the companionway.

Instantly a savage combat was begun, the little sloop swept up into the wind, with no hand now upon her tiller to guide her upon her way, and lay rocking upon the waters as the combatants madly fought for mastery.

"Help us, Dick, for this is the devil himself to master," cried one of the struggling men, addressing the man who stood in the companionway eagerly watching the fierce fight for mastery.

Instantly the one addressed sprang forward to aid, when the forward hatchway was thrown off, a form sprang nimbly on deck and a fourth actor appeared upon the scene.

There was a flash and report, a groan, a man hurled backward in the cockpit, and then the stern words:

"You are my game! Hands up, or you go after your dead comrade!"

"Hands up it is, mate!" cried one of the combatants.

And as he spoke he was seized by the one who had so unexpectedly appeared from forward and hurled into the cabin, his companion springing after him before he too should feel the weight of the arm of the bold man who had so mysteriously appeared and come to the rescue.

But upon the deck lay a form that was motionless, and rising from the cockpit, where he had been hurled by his assailants, was Austin Markham.

"Allow me to aid you, sir, and I trust you are not seriously hurt?" said the stranger, and he helped the old man to his feet.

"I was, as I believed, alone on this vessel, and I was taken by surprise, and but for you, sir, would have been slain, for they sought my life, and, as it is, wounded me slightly several times; but may I ask an explanation of it all, for I am mystified wholly?"

"Certainly, sir, as soon as I have secured these jail-birds as I wish to."

"Ho, within there! One of you come out!"

At the command the stranger threw open the door of the companionway, and out stepped one of the men, and instantly he had a pair of handcuffs slipped upon his wrists, his arms being forced behind him.

"Next!" was the cool order, and out stepped the second man, and he too was as promptly ironed.

"Now get back into the the cabin, and you can have your dead pal for company," said the stranger, and he bent over the prostrate form.

"Is he dead, sir?" asked Austin Markham.

"Oh, yes, for I shot to kill, not caring to have too much of this kind of material to face, for no three more desperate villains could be found than this trio."

So saying, he raised the dead body in his arms and carried it into the cabin.

A moment later he came out, and said pleasantly:

"Now we can get the sloop on her course again. Where were you bound?"

"To my abiding-place, sir."

"May I ask where that is?"

"Upon the East River, above Astoria."

"Are you skipper of this craft?"

"I am, sir."

"You own it?"

"I do."

"Your occupation, please?"

"I am a gentleman of leisure," was the calm reply.

The moon revealed distinctly the man, who gave utterance to these words, in all his sad-faced wretchedness, and the poverty of his attire, and the stranger could hardly repress a smile, while he said quickly:

"It is a profession that does not seem to pay you much of an income."

"I am not wholly a pauper, sir, for I own this little craft, and I have a few dollars to eke out an existence with, as long as I shall incur the earth."

"I hope so, sir; but, may I ask if you cruise about all alone in this little sloop?"

"Yes, for I am a kind of sea tramp, though I have an abiding-place as I said; and thither I am bound; but, may I ask how it is that I found passengers aboard my humble little sloop, when none were expected?"

"I have been shadowing those three men for some days, hoping to catch them, and I was in a boat under a wharf, upon which two of them were sitting, when you came down, got on board your little sloop and shoved off."

"The third man, the one I killed, then joined them, and said he had seen you come out of a pawnbroker's, where you had sold a diamond for a large sum, which you had with you, and he had heard you tell the shopkeeper that you had to run up the Hudson just above Yonkers, to make a visit, but would return next day to get him make some sales for you."

"We'll go up and bag him," was the remark

of one of the men, and it was at once agreed to.

"Then the one who had been on your track said that you had fully five hundred dollars, and it was well worth it, while they could kill you, sell the sloop and thus make a good haul of it."

"They took a close look at your sloop and then started up-town to catch the train to Yonkers, and I came out from my hiding-place under the wharf, and also started for Yonkers."

"They arrived ahead of you, as I did also, and saw you anchor not far from the Markham mansion."

"They hid in some bushes on the bank, and I did the same."

"After a while, as you landed and went up toward the mansion, they seemed to think you would be absent some time, so they walked rapidly toward the village, while I went up the shore to where some children were playing, and got them to put me on board the sloop."

"Hiding in the hold, I awaited events, for I was certain they would soon come on board, and I was not disappointed, as a boat soon came in sight, and they were in it while a negro was at the oars."

"He placed them on the deck, and while they hastily entered the cabin, he pulled away, having evidently received his orders and fee beforehand."

"It was now dark, and soon after you came on board, got under way, and you know the rest."

"I thank you, sir, for your story, and more, I owe you my life, and would ask who it is that has so befriended me?" and the old man spoke with deep feeling, while he gazed earnestly into the face of the man who sat beside him, his hand upon the tiller, holding the sloop upon her way down the river.

The moon shone brightly, and the face of the stranger was revealed—a face to see and not forget.

He was a young man, not more than twenty-two, with perfect features, darkly bronzed complexion, and the expression of one who would do and dare anything.

His form was tall, the perfection of manly beauty and grace, and his movements were quick and determined.

He was dressed in deep black, wore a sable slouch hat, and looked the gentleman.

In answer to the question of the old wanderer, he answered quietly:

"I am known as *Chandos, the Shadow Detective*, and you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER V.

THE HAUNTED WRECK.

FOR a quarter of a century no one had dwelt in Grayhurst Grange, and the old home had come to be looked upon as a place to be avoided, for many a rumor was afloat regarding it, and the old weather-beaten vessel that lay at anchor in the little land-locked haven a hundred yards from the dwelling.

Time was when young people were wont to meet on moonlight nights, and dance on the broad deck of the anchored brig, and listen to the echo of their voices sent back from the old homestead up among the trees.

But one night a pleasure party boarding the old vessel had been confronted with a sight that sent them hurrying back into their boats, which were pulled away as fast as mortal hands could force them through the waters.

Whatever it was that they had seen, all united in pronouncing it a ghost, the specter form of an old sailor clad in white, who had stood on the quarter-deck and waved them off.

From that night no one cared to go there for pleasure, and few would even row into the little haven by day to have a look at the decaying vessel and the home on the hill-slope going to ruin.

Strange stories, too, gained ground regarding the old homestead, and as they passed from lip to lip, and were told along the shores, it came to be an acknowledged fact that Grayhurst Grange was haunted, as well as the old hulk in the little harbor.

After the departure of Austin Markham from the home, for some reason the servants cared not to live there with the new master, who had received the old sailor's wealth, and so he had shut up the house and gone to the city to spend the rest of his leave of absence.

Then, not strange to say, he had become a daily visitor at Placide Place, and before long he was the accepted suitor of Estelle Placide.

The knowing ones said it was the old merchant's doing, and that the saddening face of the maiden showed that her love was with the other brother, the penniless wanderer; but, be that as it may, she accepted the offer of his heart, made in a manly, generous way, with the full knowledge, he said, that she had loved his brother, and yet, loving her to idolatry, he asked her to become his wife.

So they were married in Placide Place, and Grayhurst Grange, which had been thoroughly overhauled and newly furnished, was to be their home, as Merchant Placide, for some reason, desired to sell his mansion.

With the end of the honeymoon, Alfred Markham was ordered to join his regiment in

the West, and he left his beautiful wife in the care of her father, and departed.

Thus a year or more passed away, and Alfred Markham returned home on leave, having been wounded in an engagement with the red-skins.

Hardly had he been back a week before there was trouble in the old home, for the servants came to him with stories of strange sights and sounds being seen and heard nightly in the unoccupied wings of the house.

In vain did he tell them it was nonsense, for they would not remain, and one night, when alone in the house, with his wife and her father, they, too, saw lights flashing in the windows of the unoccupied wing, and heard shrieks and demoniacal laughter.

Alfred Markham was no coward, and so he went to investigate, his wife pluckily carrying the lamp.

But, as he unlocked the door leading into the unoccupied rooms there came a puff of wind that put out the lamp, a shriek followed, and in abject terror Mrs. Markham swooned away.

Raising her in his arms Lieutenant Markham retreated to the library, where Merchant Placide awaited them, trembling with fear.

Soon she revived, and said faintly:

"We must leave this house in the morning, Alfred."

"If you so wish, my dear, after I have had it thoroughly searched by day, to see who it is that is playing these wicked pranks upon us," was the reply.

But during the night Merchant Placide was taken very ill, and with the dawn, as soon as he durst leave his wife, Alfred Markham went after the doctor.

But his services were useless, as the old merchant passed away, leaving his daughter no fortune, as all believed he would, but penniless.

Away from Grayhurst Grange they went—Alfred Markham and his wife, as soon as the funeral was over, and in the busy city the two forgot the scenes through which they had passed in the old home.

Purchasing a lordly estate upon the Hudson, Alfred Markham removed thither the furniture from Grayhurst Grange, and the old place was left to its haunting sprits and decay.

Possessing the vast wealth left by old Captain Grayhurst, Alfred Markham cared but little for the estate of Grayhurst Grange, its two-score of acres surrounding, and the old brig, which the will of her master said should never be sold, and so was content to let all go to ruin, while he made the resolve never to set foot there again, for, try as he might to cast off the superstitious dread that had come over him, regarding what he had there seen and heard, he could not do so.

Thus it was that after having won high rank, and resigned from the army, he settled down to enjoy life in his lordly home on the Hudson. Old Grayhurst Grange, a haunted heritage, was deserted, shunned, and slowly going to decay.

About its eaves the birds built their nests, the bats made it their haunt, the winds moving its heavy shutters to and fro with creaking sound, and each year the Finger of Time sunk deeper and deeper.

In the little haven, riding at double anchor, lay the brig, her decks and sides weather-worn, her masts and spars blackened, every vestige of canvas gone, and her rigging wearing away.

A pitiful sight indeed, and almost in sound of the great city, a grand old home, a staunch vessel, going to ruin, and haunted with dread memories that caused them to be shunned by all.

Twenty-five years have gone by since old Captain Guy Grayhurst died, and a small craft is heading through the darkness into the little cove where lies at anchor the old brig he had commanded.

Can it be that the crew are dreading the storm that sweeps over the waters, and are seeking a safe anchorage, knowing not the story told of the harbor and the home upon its sloping shores?

The vessel is a sloop, and her mainsail and jib are reefed down; yet she feels the pressure severely of the wind and driving rain, and bends far over at times, as she bounds from wave to wave.

A few moments more and she is under the lee of the encircling arm of land, and gliding more smoothly along, she heads for the old brig, which rises like a grim specter vessel before her, silent, deserted, somber.

But one person was visible upon the little sloop, and huffing sharp he ran alongside the old brig, and hastily making her fast, sprung on deck over the fore-castle.

As he did so a white-robed form came out of the cabin and advanced toward him.

Then the two halted, the man from the sloop, and the shrouded, spectral form that had come from the brig's cabin.

A moment they stood thus, glancing at each other, and then the bold intruder advanced quickly toward his spectral adversary.

Instantly the white-clad occupant of the hulk turned and running toward the stern of the brig, sprung into the rough waters, while the other quickly followed as far as the bulwarks,

and stood gazing down into the darkness after him.

The man who had boarded the brig, and put to flight the Spirit of the Haunted Wreck was Austin Markham.

He had dared, in the tatters of a vagabond, to seek the home of his twin brother, who had married the one woman he had ever loved—he had dared, alone, and wounded from the attack of Egbert Markham's dog upon him, and his fight for life with the men who had boarded his sloop, to return to the home of his boyhood, the home from which he had been sent a wandering outcast into the world.

There was some mystery in this return—what, the sequel alone will show.

CHAPTER VI.

A PRISONER FOR LIFE.

"THE ghosts have not driven the rats away from the old wreck, that is certain," said Austin Markham, as he entered the cabin, lantern in hand, for he had returned to his sloop to procure a light, after having been confronted by the white-robed form.

Entering the cabin the rats skurried away with frightened squeals, as though they had not seen mortal company in many a long day.

The cabin was, indeed, desolate-looking, and there was no sign of its having had an occupant for years; but Austin Markham was not satisfied with this investigation, and began a thorough search of the state-rooms.

One after the other was visited, until the last, the fourth, only remained.

Throwing back the door he glanced in, something seeming to tell him that he should find that there for which he evidently searched.

"Ah! here is the home of the ghost. I thought rats would not be here without something to feed on, and ghosts must eat too, it seems."

Holding the lantern above his head he regarded the state-room attentively.

There was a bunk containing bedding, some shelves with dishes upon them, a small stove with a frying-pan, gridiron and coffee-pot on it, a pile of wood in one corner, a box containing provisions, and various other articles to indicate that the occupant, ghost or mortal, made himself as comfortable as the circumstances would permit.

The bunk seemed to have been recently occupied, and it was evident that the shock of the sloop coming alongside of the brig had aroused the occupant and sent him hastily on deck to frighten off the bold intruder of the Haunted Wreck.

"He came to frighten me with his mummery, and got frightened himself."

"If the poor fellow could not swim he has gone to the bottom; who can he be, I wonder?" and the man carefully searched about the state-room, and suddenly came upon a pair of handcuffs, which had been filed in two.

"Ah! these tell a story, at least."

"He is a convict or a madman, and escaping, has been hiding here."

"I will take these iron tell-tales, and hold possession of the brig, at least for awhile."

So saying Austin Markham returned to the deck, and retracing his way forward, descended to the deck of his little sloop.

There was yet some time before dawn would break, and making his sloop fast, fore and aft, to the brig, he lowered his sail and entered his own little cabin.

It was small but cosy quarters, with two bunks, and every indication that it was used as a home by the wanderer, while its neat appearance was in strange contrast to the occupant's ragged, trampish look.

Examining his wounded arm, and a couple of wounds upon his shoulder and broad chest, they showed that they had been dressed by no unskilled hand, and, taking from his pocket a small bottle he dampened the bandages with some of the mixture.

"Now can I sleep, or will the pain in my heart, this wild throbbing in my brain, after what I have passed through to-day, keep me awake?"

"I must try to sleep, for I am too old now to suffer from heart-aches given twenty-five long years ago."

"Ah, me! love, no more than hatred ever dies," and the old wanderer put out his lantern and threw himself down to rest within his bunk.

It was a long time before sleep came to close his eyelids, and he was just sinking into slumber when he felt his sloop move, and he knew that it was from some weight boarding upon one side.

Above his head were a pair of pistols, and he reached his hand up and grasped one.

Then he waited, and heard a light step on deck.

Next followed a slight rocking of the sloop, and he knew that the one who had boarded had gotten upon the brig.

Quickly and silently he slipped from his bunk, and going on deck sprung up the side of the brig, to behold in the early dawn a white form gliding into the cabin.

Instantly he followed, swiftly and noiselessly, and entering the cabin beheld the glimmer of a light coming from the inner room, which he had discovered was the home of some mysterious occupant of the brig.

Without a sound from his footfalls he reached the open door and beheld the occupant hastily gathering a few things together, as though intending an instant departure.

The man was large in stature, had a heavily-bearded face, was enveloped in a white cloth, which hung from his shoulders to the floor, while a hood was drawn over his head.

It was dripping wet, and the water had formed a trail along the deck to the state-room.

"Hands up, sir, or die!"

The deep voice of the wanderer brought a groan from the one to whom the startling words were addressed.

But, though he started and quivered, as he saw the tall form of the wanderer back in the shadow of the gangway, and a pistol leveled at him, with no tremor in the hand that held it, he did not obey by holding his hands above his head.

"Quick! Obey or die!" again came the deep-toned command.

But the arms were folded upon the breast, and there came in a voice that was firm, yet full of sadness:

"Kill me, for better death than what I will be doomed to suffer."

The wanderer seemed touched by the sadness that overspread the face, for the lantern, which the strange occupant of the brig had lighted immediately upon his return, shone brightly upon him, and the words he had uttered had been full of pathos and mysterious meaning.

Lowering his weapon, he said in a voice less stern:

"Who and what are you?"

Distinct and earnest was the response:

"A man, innocent of crime, yet falsely accused! My name it matters not; what I am is told in the words—a prisoner for life and an escaped convict."

"Now aim at my heart and kill me, for I welcome death!"

The pistol was instantly lowered, and the wanderer stepped into the state-room, while he said:

"I am not a man to harm one in misfortune, for such have my sympathy, and your words have proven to me that you are guiltless."

"What your crime may be I know not, and care not; but I came to this old hulk for a purpose, unmindful of the weird stories told of it, and the homestead up yonder in the woods."

"I intend to remain here, or rather in the old rookery on the hill, to carry out the purpose I have in view, and just such as you are can aid me."

"Will you do so?"

"Gladly! There is my hand on it—if you will take a convict's hand, and believe his words," and the man drew back in an embarrassed way.

"How know you but that I am a convict, a murderer?"

"Look at me! Do I appear one to command respect, one to shrink from a felon?"

"I think not, if appearances go for aught, and there is my hand on my friendship and protection to you, if you will take the hand of such as I."

"Ah, sir, you are different from what you appear, for, ragged though you are, your face is not that of a vagabond, and you are else than you seem."

"I am a wanderer on sea and land, no more; but I am your friend, so have no fear and come with me."

"Whither would you have me go?"

"Away from this wreck, up to the old owl's nest on the hill, the haunted home of the Grayhursts, for there you will be safe, but not here, for I have an appointment on this old hulk this coming night."

"An appointment, sir?" asked the prisoner for life, impressed with his strange companion.

"Yes."

"Dare any one come to this old wreck?"

"I dared come."

"You seem not like other men, sir."

"Those who come do so at my request."

"There are more than one, then?"

"Yes, there will be several."

"May I ask who they are?" and the convict seemed strangely nervous.

"They are men known as Shadow Detectives."

"Great God!" and the convict started back, his face livid with terror.

"My poor fellow, have no fear, for said I not that I would protect you?" said the wanderer, kindly.

"Yes, and I trust you, sir, with my life."

"Then come with me, for it is early dawn, and we must gain the bats' retreat before curious eyes may see us," and bidding the convict gather up what things he could carry, Austin Markham led the way from the cabin, and going ashore in the sloop's little boat they strode up to the rear door of the old mansion, just as the sun peered through the foliage of the forest surrounding the haunted homestead.

CHAPTER VII.

A SKELETON IN THE CLOSET.

"You know these grounds?"

The remark was addressed to Austin Markham by the convict, as the former led the way around the building, under an arched way, to the rear cellar door, beneath a back piazza.

"Yes, I know them well," was the calm response, as the wanderer reached his hand up to the combing over a window and took therefrom a key.

He smiled as he did so, a strange kind of smile, while he muttered half-aloud:

"That is a secret I have not forgotten for twenty-five years, for I placed it there myself."

"Now to see if the lock has been changed."

He thrust the large iron key into the lock of the massive cellar door, and though it turned hard, it yet shot back the bolt.

"Come," and shoving the door open, Markham stepped within, followed by the convict.

A musty smell greeted their nostrils, but closing the door, the wanderer again locked it, and walked briskly forward, hardly seeming to need the light of the lantern he carried to show him the way.

They followed a long, narrow hallway, then ascended a pair of steep steps, and the floor was above them.

But pushing upon it, a trap-door was raised, and the two ascended to a large room, devoid of furniture.

"This was the servants' hall," said the wanderer, musingly, and he advanced toward a door which led him into a broad hallway, and from this into a spacious room on the left.

"This was the dining-room," came in the same musing tone, not addressed to the convict, but rather to himself.

It, too, was devoid of furniture, and covered with the dust and mold of years.

"It has been refitted since those days, and, in fact, many changes have been made; but with all the added splendor that the legacy bought, they could not live here."

"No! no! no!"

He uttered the words sternly, and then led the way from room to room, uttering the same comment as to what each room was.

At last he went to the old wing which had never been occupied in his memory, or even that of the old sailor, Guy Grayhurst, for the captain was wont to tell how none of his ancestors had ever cared to live in that old part of the mansion, it being the first part of the structure that was erected by the first of the family to settle in America, and who was a sea-captain.

Touching a spring in the mantle of the room adjoining the deserted wing, a slide flew back and a number of keys were revealed.

Without hesitation Austin Markham selected three, and the first one opened the door.

It creaked dismally as it swung open, and a hall was revealed, with a broad stairway leading to the floor above, and doors opening into rooms on the floor where they then were.

As in each case, the wanderer closed the door behind him, and the lantern revealed, for the shutters were barred, that this part of the old mansion was furnished.

The carpets were worn threadbare, and moth-eaten, and dust was upon all, while the furniture was of several generations before.

Yet it had been grand old furniture in its time, and the wing in itself was a complete dwelling, as there were dining-room, parlors, and bed-chambers, all furnished, yet wearing the same air of long neglect.

"There is one room above here where you can dwell, and with safety, for no one will come here to disturb you."

"It contains a good bed, and in the one adjoining you can cook your meals, but do so only at night, that the smoke may not be seen."

"Perhaps I may dwell here with you, at least part of the time, while the rest I will be on the brig, when not absent in the city."

"I wish no one to know that this mansion holds an occupant, and to keep the curious away, we will devise some plan."

"Are you content to remain here?"

"Yes, sir, though I have dreaded this old home immensely, while playing ghost upon the brig."

"I have heard it was haunted, and I have shunned it when gathering wood at night to carry aboard the brig; but I see nothing here to alarm me."

"There is nothing to disturb you, but to those who hold it as a legacy there is much to alarm," was the strange response, and, as though fearing he had said too much, Austin Markham quickly asked:

"But how did you get to and from the brig?"

"I swam to and from the shore, pushing a board that held wood and edibles upon it, for I went to the village when necessary and bought provisions."

"You are a strange man," said the wanderer musingly.

"And you are a stranger one," was the reply, in an awed kind of way, for the convict was indeed impressed by his mysterious companion.

"This is the room," said Markham, throwing

open a door which seemed not to have been disturbed for many a long year.

"Great God!"

The cry came from the lips of the wanderer. He at last had found something in the old house to amaze him, while the convict had been surprised from the moment he had entered it.

It was a large room, with no window visible in it, only the door in which they stood and one just opposite.

Both of these doors were massive and the walls were solid.

There was above a skylight, with iron bars, a few inches apart, over it, and from there came the light and air, for a chain hung down that raised or lowered a sash at the will of the occupant.

There was a bed in the room, a chair, a table, and that was all, excepting a stone jar, a plate and a cup on the table.

But the bed held an occupant, and this it was that had caused the cry of the wanderer.

The bed held an occupant, yes; but one that sent a thrill of horror through the strong frame of the old vagabond and the convict, for it was a skeleton form in irons!

It was a startling sight, an appalling one, for the flesh had crumbled away to dust, the clothing was in shreds, and the bones of a human being lay upon the bed, the hands clasped upon his heart, but iron handcuffs about his wrists, and the feet also in manacles.

Alone, that poor wretch had laid him down to die.

Helpless, at the mercy of some foe, the unhappy one had died in irons, and while the flesh had crumbled to dust, the bones remained a damning proof of some crime committed.

Walking up to the bedside the wanderer gazed down upon the skeleton form, the light from above revealing it distinctly, while the convict, in awe, hung back by the door.

"Locked in here to die, you have breathed your last alone and in irons."

"But, who put these irons upon you? Who turned the key against your liberty and upon your death?"

"That mystery must be solved, for thirty-five years ago, when a boy of fifteen, I last stood in this room."

"It was a stormy, wild night, and I was lured to come here in a spirit of bravado, to explore this old wing."

"You, poor mortal, were not here then."

"Who are you, and who was your cruel foe?"

"These secrets I must know."

The wanderer had mused aloud, and then, turning to the convict, he said:

"This is a secret I had not expected to find."

"I knew there was a skeleton in each closet of this old house, figuratively speaking; but I did not expect to find a skeleton in reality here."

"Come, let us leave him in his sepulcher, and seek an abiding-place elsewhere in the old rookery," and walking across the room to the other door, the wanderer opened it with one of his keys, and glanced within.

It had a window, a fireplace, and there were a number of old chests and boxes therein, nothing more.

"In those old chests there is a fortune in ancient costumes," he muttered, and relocking the door, he again glanced at the skeleton and departed from the sepulcher of the unhappy wretch who had died in irons, and after long years turned up as a real "skeleton in the closet" of the old Grayhurst mansion.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONVICT'S STORY.

As the sun drew near the western horizon, two men stood at an upper window of the old Grayhurst mansion, gazing out upon the scene before them—the sloping hillside, the little cove, upon whose quiet bosom rested the old brig, with the little sloop alongside, and the broad expanse of river beyond.

The room was a pleasant one, not in the wing of the old structure that had been so dreaded, but which Austin Markham had had for his own chamber when a boy.

The two were the wanderer and the convict, and they had made the room, from various things brought there, a by no means uncomfortable abiding-place, if its solitude and the haunting memories surrounding it are not considered.

There was a large fireplace, plenty of windows, with heavy shutters to close out a light by night, from any one who might pass near, and the convict had brought with him from the brig the things he most needed for his use.

A room adjoining was the one that Alfred Markham had occupied as a boy, and afterward as a cadet, after his graduation at West Point.

From some strange freak of the heir, he had left this room furnished as it then was, taking seemingly nothing therefrom, when he had moved away, though he had stripped the new wing of the house of its furniture.

"I will be often here, so I will take this room," had said the wanderer, as his eyes rested upon the white wall, where, executed in a most artistic manner, was a life-sized pencil sketch of a maiden's face.

One glance was sufficient to show that it was a likeness of Estelle Placide, as she was then, and Austin Markham knew that his brother, no mean artist, had sketched it, several days after his first meeting the maiden.

"A beautiful face, so full of purity and soul," said the convict, as he viewed it with a critic's eye.

"You are right, sir; but what think you of that face?" and the wanderer pointed to a portrait that hung on the wall, of Alfred Markham in his uniform, as he was as a lieutenant, for it had never been removed by him.

"A face that might have been noble, for it has all the qualifications; but a face to fear, a face not to trust."

"A few touches of the brush could make it the countenance of an angel, and a few also could make it the visage of a devil."

"Sir Convict, you speak as one who reads human nature like an open book, and you are a man of education."

"Yes, I am a college graduate, and I was an artist," was the sad response, while he added bitterly:

"But neither talent nor education saved me from prison."

"May I ask your name, sir?" and Austin Markham could not but feel respect for the man whom he had so strangely met, and who had confessed that he was a convict, under life sentence.

"Against my name there is the stigma of a foul crime, so I care not to tell it even to you, but you may call me Fairfax, if you prefer it to convict."

"I do, by all means, and you may as well know me as Nero."

"A cruel name, sir."

"True, and withal a just one; but you tell me that you are guiltless of the crime that sent you to prison for life?"

"As Heaven is my judge, I am," and the convict raised his hand aloft and spoke in a voice and manner of deep earnestness.

"I believe you."

"I thank you, sir, and if you care to know my story, I will tell it you."

"I do," and the strange man fixed his gaze upon the face of the convict as though to read there the truth or falsity of all that he would say.

But Fairfax, as he had called himself, did not flinch, and said, as he folded his arms and leant against the window:

"Who I am, or where from, it matters not; but I was reared in refinement, and my parents were wealthy, as I believed; at least they lived well, sent me abroad to be educated, and after graduating I devoted myself to art, for it was my ambition to become an artist."

"I studied art in Italy for two years, and was then called home by the death of my father, who had been thrown from his carriage and killed, leaving my mother and myself penniless, where we expected riches."

"I went to work, to support my mother and myself, and yet it was a hard struggle, for I had no name as an artist, and my poor mother was an invalid and required a nurse and daily visits from a physician, all of which were a severe tax upon my slim purse, though not upon my love, I can assure you."

"After lingering for a year my dear mother died, and I was alone in the world, so to speak, for though I had kindred, and rich ones, they deserted us in our misfortune."

"So goes the world of humanity," broke in the deep voice of Austin Markham.

"I worked hard at my art, and was beginning to get a foothold on the ladder of fame when one day a distant relative returned from a long sojourn in India."

"He had gone away as a *mauvais sujet* before the mast, and had never expected to amount to anything; but he came back a millionaire."

"Being unmarried, he looked around for an heir, and had about decided upon a young cousin of mine, when he learned that he was a very fast youth, and he gave him up, and accidentally one day I met him, and he gave out that I should inherit his fortune, for he had greatly loved my mother."

"He was a good-souled old man, but odd as a woman, and flatly told me I should not have a dollar until his death, so it did not help my present poverty, only gave me prospects of wealth in the future."

"I had a friend who had been well off, and who had often helped me in a small way, and he got into trouble, lost what he had, and, with his wife and two children was left destitute."

"He was very anxious to go West, for he had an opening there, and begged me to raise him the money."

"I went to my old kinsman and told him the circumstances, and his answer was blunt and to the point:

"I had no one to help me, and you have no money to give him, for I will not let you have a dollar! I have made my will in your favor, and you have got to wait my death to get the money."

"On my way from my kinsman's, I met a gentleman who was to sail for Europe, and seeing me reminded him that he owed a brother ar-

tist of mine a couple of hundred dollars, and he gave it to me to give to him.

"My artist friend was absent for a few days, and I sat in my studio wondering how I could get the money I needed, when in came my cousin, the fast youth I spoke of as having been cast off by the old East Indian.

"I told him about my poor friend, asked him for a loan, and as he did not have it, I said that I was tempted to use the money I had in keeping, and give the artist security on my paintings until I paid him back.

"Then he told me that I might go with him and try my luck in gambling, and that I could readily win the sum I wanted, by following his advice.

"I was tempted, and, to make a long story short, I lost the two hundred. My cousin urged me to play on to get it back, and I left there, owing the gamblers over a thousand dollars, they holding my notes at ten days. I was in despair.

"The following night my old kinsman was murdered, and in his room was found one of my cuffs, with the sleeve-button in it, and an Italian stiletto, which I had brought with me from abroad.

"With this he had been killed, and with the cuff in evidence against me, with the old man's diamond studs hidden away in my studio, and the knowledge that I had gambled away the two hundred dollars intrusted to me, and owed over a thousand more that must be paid, there was no escape for me.

"I was not guilty, and I believe the jury in their hearts believed so, for they recommended me to mercy.

"The mercy that I received was to be saved from the gallows, and to be sent a prisoner for life behind stone walls and iron gratings.

"Death were preferable, and one night I took big chances against death, and I won, for I escaped, and in terror of being retaken, I have lived for months on board yonder old brig, for I had a small diamond ring, my mother's, that I concealed and kept with me in prison, and I pledged it to buy me food, and it has supported me all this time, for I have trapped game in the woods, have caught fish by night, and, I must confess it, have stolen vegetables from gardens, so that I have kept from starving.

"Such is my story, sir, in all its truth, cruel persecution and bitterness."

"Did you have no suspicion of who the murderer was?" asked the wanderer, calmly, and who had seemed to be deeply interested in the convict's story.

"Oh, sir; I only knew that circumstantial evidence was fearfully against me, and that some one, to escape himself, had placed suspicion upon me."

"Well, we must find this out, and I will, for, as I said before, I have friends coming to-night, who are known as shadow detectives, and they will ferret out this mystery for you, I am sure; but now I must go to hunt them," and as the twilight began to gather, the wanderer left the room and the mansion, wending his way to the shore, and thence taking his little boat out to the brig.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE COMPACT.

HAVING lighted his lantern in the brig's cabin, Austin Markham went on deck and began to pace to and fro.

His movements were such as to cause a seaman to feel that he had been a sailor, for there was nothing of the landsman in his step.

Suddenly he halted and glanced out over the waters toward the entrance to the little haven.

"He is coming, and prompt," he muttered, as his eyes caught sight of a dark object upon the waters.

It was coming directly into the haven, and yet it seemed to move without sound.

"He is cautious for his oars are muffled," the wanderer said, as the boat drew nearer.

Silent and black it came on, urged by the steady sweep of four oars.

It was getting lighter, for the moon was rising and Markham counted two persons in the boat, besides the four oarsmen.

"Enough to master me, should he prove false," he muttered, adding a moment later:

"But he will not do that.

"Boat ahoy!" he called out in his deep tones.

"Ahoy the Grayhurst!" was the answer from the boat.

"Ay, ay, sir! Run alongside of the sloop and come on board," and the boat was headed for the little sloop.

As it ran alongside a tall form sprang out, and the next moment confronted Austin Markham on the deck of the brig.

It was the young man who had saved him from the robbers, and who had called himself Chandos, the Shadow Detective.

"I am here, sir," he said, pleasantly, offering his hand.

"Yes, I felt that you would come, or you would not have released me."

"No, had I believed what you said to be the ravings of a madman I would not have released you; but what a weird old craft this is," and the young man glanced about the vessel.

"Yes, she has lain at anchor here for over thirty years, and like yonder old house up among the trees, is crumbling to ruin."

"I have heard of the old Grayhurst homestead and of this brig, and have intended exploring them both some day, for I saw them in passing on the river several times, and I was glad when you made your appointment with me here; but how are your wounds, sir?"

"Quite comfortable, thank you; but come into the cabin with me," and the wanderer led the way into the cabin and motioned his visitor to a seat in one of the time-worn chairs.

"What a strange freak in the old master of Grayhurst to leave his vessel here to go to wreck as it has," said the young man glancing about him with curious interest, and then adding:

"It is no wonder that the superstitious fear to come here, for I could easily imagine all sorts of specters here."

"Captain Grayhurst was a very strange man, sir, I can assure you, and he left a very strange will behind him, while the heir, who got the broad acres near, this brig and the old mansion, could not live here, and is seemingly glad to get off his hands a heritage he does not care for.

"But whom brought you with you?"

"My little band of shadowers, that is all, sir."

"Now let us to business, young man."

"I am at your service, sir."

"You saved my life, my young friend, and taking the words of the men you overheard talking, regarding my selling a diamond, and having other valuables to dispose of, you deemed me a river pirate, a burglar, or something worse."

"You could not understand my living alone in my little sloop, going where I pleased, appearing a tramp, a veriest vagabond, yet having jewels to sell."

"So you meant to hold me a prisoner when we reached New York, believing me as guilty as the men you had saved me from."

"I told you that I was no thief, I told you that I was a man carrying out a certain destiny in life, that I was bowed with years, with sorrows, and asked you to trust me, and release me on my word of honor to meet you to-night at this place."

"You did so, and after taking me to a physician and having my wounds dressed, you allowed me to go."

"I am here, so have kept my word, and I am going to tell you why I wished you to come here."

"I could not doubt you, sir, and yet appearances were sadly against you."

"Appearances are against the innocent and in favor of the guilty in six cases out of ten; but you told me that you were a detective?"

"I am, sir."

"And you were set to watch those three men, and boldly faced the trio, to catch them together, and me along with them?"

"I was not set to do the work, for I am my own master, doing special work that comes in my way, while ferreting out a certain crime that I am anxious to get at the bottom of."

"May I ask you to make a *confidante* of me, for I mean you well?"

"There is a something that draws me toward you, sir, commanding my confidence and my respect, and that is why I released you upon your own recognizance."

"In a word, I was reared a sailor, having graduated as a midshipman in the navy; but my father dying, my mother urged that I should give up the sea and live with her and my sister, who was a number of years my senior, and, as I believed, unmarried."

"I obeyed, and received a lucrative position in a bank, and was doing well."

"One day a large sum of money was missing, and whom to suspect no one knew."

"Each one in the bank looked upon the other with suspicion, and yet we could not fasten guilt upon any particular one."

"At last I began to feel that I was being talked of as the guilty one, and I was secretly arrested and examined, but no proof could be found, and so I was set at liberty, but discharged."

"Knowing my innocence, and deeply humiliated as well as angered, I determined to hunt down the criminal."

"It took me just six months, and I found him; it was the president of the bank."

"He had speculated beyond his means, and quickly picking up the pile of bills, had walked off with them unseen."

"This showed to me that I had a talent for detective work, and I took up several cases I saw rewards offered for, and I traced them to earth and got the money."

"Knowing my success in this line, my sister, who had been quite ill, made a confession to me."

"She had secretly married a man she knew nothing about, and he had forced her to conceal her marriage until he could divulge it."

"He was said to be rich, and yet he gave her nothing."

"She had a little child, but had not owned its birth even to my mother, for it had been born while she was away, as mother supposed, at boarding school."

"Suddenly this man died, from accidentally shooting himself, and he left nothing to her, and no one seemed to know of the existence of his wife and child."

"He had been taking care of the little one, having it under the care of a nurse; but my sister could find out nothing about it, and was broken-hearted, and so told me."

"It was then that I devoted myself to clear her good name, secure her just rights, and find her child; but, so far, I have been baffled."

"It was while following the clew that I saw the reward offered for those three men, and following them, thus met you, sir."

"I have six comrades leagued with me, five of whom are in the boat, and the service we have done, as specials belonging to no association, has given us the name of Shadow Detectives."

"Now you know my story, sir, and I am open to the advice which you said you could offer me, when last we met."

"My young friend, I did tell you I had some advice to give you that might be of service, and it is that you allow me, and one other, to join your band of Shadow Detectives."

"You, sir?"

"Yes, why not?"

"And one other?"

"Yes, one whom you must not see, or know, but who must act through me alone—one who has suffered by false charges, as you have, as I have; but one who will be true as steel."

"There are mysteries that I wish to solve, and I wish to link my destinies with yours, and I throw this as my initiation fee into your treasury," and the mysterious old man tossed upon the table a roll of bills, which the young detective could see numbered among the thousands.

He was speechless with amazement, while Austin Markham continued in his calm, deep tones:

"Come, there are guilty men to be run to earth, secrets to be solved, work to be done, and I ask you if I, and my unknown comrade, are to be members of your league of secret service ferrets?"

"My mysterious friend, vagabond, tramp, or whatever you may be in reality, you shall be the Chief of the Shadow Detectives from this very moment!" and Chandos the Shadow, rising, held out his hand to the old wandering vagabond.

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF A GRAVE.

LET us return to Markham Manor, the elegant home of Colonel Alfred Markham, where the vagabond wanderer, Austin, had received such a strange welcome at the hands of his own kinsfolk.

Alfred Markham had served his country well, and he had risen in rank for distinguished gallantry on the field, as we have stated.

He had fought the red-skins upon the border, been wounded, suffered privations untold, and then, thinking he had earned a rest, he had resigned his commission and gone home to enjoy the delights of home life with his family.

Possessing the vast legacy from old Guy Grayhurst, he had so invested it that his riches had increased, and he was regarded as one of the wealthiest dwellers upon the Hudson River.

He had added to his house until he had made it almost a palace, he had furnished it luxuriously throughout, his stables were filled with blooded horses, and seldom was it that there were not guests in the spacious mansion.

He counted his servants almost a score, and all that heart could desire in the way of home luxury could be had at Markham Manor.

His beautiful wife, ever sad-faced and soft-voiced, had a kind word for one and all alike.

She was accomplished, her exquisite voice yet had the power to charm all when raised in song, and her small hands swept the harp-strings with a master touch.

She rode horseback with her husband and children, was wont to drive her own span of horses, and sail in the pretty yacht which the colonel had had built, or row upon the waters of the Hudson by the hour, while at times she would steal away to some quiet glen, sketch a bit of scenery, and paint, for she was skilled as an artist.

These pastimes kept her young, and time had dealt kindly with her face and form, though she was the mother of three children, one of whom was a cadet at West Point.

And her children? Egbert, the eldest, she had wished to name Austin, after his uncle, but the colonel said a decided

"No!"

Then she had suggested the name of Grayhurst, after the old sailor captain; but again the colonel said no, and a compromise was made upon her father's name of Egbert.

When Mercer was born, Mrs. Markham had again tried to have him named either Austin or Grayhurst; but again the colonel was firm, and her mother's maiden name of Mercer was chosen.

"Why do you object to both Austin and

Grayhurst, Alfred?" she had asked, wonderingly.

"My brother, in temper, left me, after I got the fortune which he expected to get, and refusing my offer of half of it, went his way alone in the world, and I wish never to be reminded of his name," was the decided answer.

"But Uncle Grayhurst left you his fortune, Alfred, and I think our younger son at least might bear his name," urged Mrs. Markham.

"No, Estelle; I do not care to be reminded of how I got my fortune.

"Candidly, Uncle Grayhurst was not a credit to the family, and he may have been an old pirate, for all I know, and the least reminder we have of him the better for us.

"I have given up Grayhurst Grange to the owls and rats, and so let it go until some day it may bring a good sum in a sale.

"Now, do not let us speak of this matter again."

So it was dismissed, and yet the wife could not forget the past.

Her father had died poor, where she had expected to be an heiress to a large fortune, and so she remained quiet.

Her husband was kind to her; he certainly loved her; he never spoke harshly, and yet he was fretful when the past was alluded to, for he knew that his money, his securing the Grayhurst heritage, had gotten for him the sweetheart of his brother for a wife.

In rearing his children Alfred Markham had made a mistake, for he had instilled into them, from earliest childhood, a false pride of birth, and taught them to look down upon all who were not their equals, according to their own mistaken views of equality.

Mrs. Markham had seen the fruits of this false training, and tried to check it; but she tried in vain, so prone is one to go the wrong way.

Allowing his children ample money to spend, Colonel Markham had caused them to become extravagant.

He had never known what it was to toil for his living, and getting his money without effort, he spent it freely, living up to his income, though, to his credit be it said, not drawing upon the basis.

Mrs. Markham in this respect was also indifferent and extravagant in the use of money, for she had never been taught economy by her father.

With Egbert at West Point, Edith just graduated from a fashionable boarding-school and entering society, and Mercer under a tutor's care, matters stood at the opening of this story, the young cadet being home on a supposed sick leave.

But there is another member of the family of whom I have not here spoken, and that is the little golden-haired maid who alone protected the vagabond wanderer, and received from him a blow that laid her stunned upon the pavement.

Among Colonel Markham's friends was one whom he had seemed to regard more highly than all others.

He had passed weeks at Markham Manor, visiting the colonel, and when he had at last died, his death was a strange one, for he had said that he accidentally shot himself, and more he would not say about it, though he knew his death was at hand.

In dying he had left his child to the guardianship of Colonel Markham, who was also given charge of the effects of the dead man, at his request, and the inheritance of the child, whatever it was; but it was said that the dead man had been very rich.

After his death, however, his attendant physician had called Colonel Markham into the room, and said:

"Colonel, I deem it my duty now to tell you what discovery I made, though I pledged my word to Victor that I would allow no one else to know.

"He told me that he had been loading his pistol, and it was accidentally discharged; but when I examined the wound I saw that it had been made by a knife, or rather a sword-blade.

"See, this is no bullet wound," and the doctor revealed the wound to Colonel Markham.

"By Heaven! but you are right, doctor!" cried the colonel, in amazement.

"Now, Victor and I have long been friends, and though I urged him to give me his confidence in the matter he would not, and died, carrying the secret of his death-wound into the grave with him.

"Did he kill himself, or if not, who gave him that death-wound?"

"God only knows, Connor, for I cannot even guess at a solution of the mystery," said the colonel.

"Nor I, and it remains for you to decide whether he shall be buried with his secret, or we make an effort to solve the mystery."

"I do not feel that it could do any good, for we have not the slightest clue to give the detectives to work on, while his story has gone abroad, and, for his child's sake, so let it be."

"I agree with you, Colonel Markham, for it certainly was Victor's wish to have it so, and I will see that no busy eyes discover the secret, and remain by him until the coffin closes over him."

And thus it was decided, and the man went into his grave, bearing the secret with him of how he met his death.

And Alice, the beautiful child of the man, who had died with sealed lips against some deadly foe, went to Markham Manor to live, where she was greeted by Edith and Mercer, who were then at home, with a warm welcome, while Mrs. Markham acted a mother's part to the little orphan.

But a few months after Colonel Markham came home with the information that Alice had been left a bare pittance yearly by her father, where it had been supposed that she would receive a large fortune.

The girl knew too little about money to care; but as the secret was told to Edith and Mercer, they, from that moment, regarded the little orphan with far less respect than had she been an heiress, and Egbert, too, when at home for a few days, showed that she was less deserving of the marked consideration he had at first shown her.

So matters stood when Austin Markham, the wanderer, visited Markham Manor that pleasant summer afternoon, to meet with a rebuff that sunk deep into his heart.

CHAPTER XI.

AT MARKHAM MANOR.

AND so matters were at Markham Manor, when the man who had been hardly spoken of in twenty-five long years, came back to visit his twin brother.

The children had been told by their father, of an uncle, who had left home in anger, because he had not received the Grayhurst heritage, and little more did they know of him, or care.

Whether he was dead or alive Alfred Markham did not know; but he could not forget him, strive as he might, and often the memory of that noble twin brother would rise before him, and his conscience pricked him at times that he had been the one who had devoted his life to old Captain Grayhurst, he had been the one to save the merchant Placide and Estelle from death, and should have had the fortune for his own, the maiden for his wife.

Alfred Markham had been wild, he knew, he had given Captain Grayhurst much cause for worry, had cost him many a dollar, and he knew that his brother had been only a joy and a comfort to him; but yet the will left him the heir, and those who should know had said that Master Austin had done something to displease the old man, that he should have cut him off in the end with a few thousand dollars.

Seated in the library that afternoon of Austin Markham's coming, the colonel had been conversing to his wife, while the children were out upon the piazza.

The subject of conversation had been Alice Victor, the colonel's ward, and Mrs. Markham had been telling her husband that their children were not as kind to the little orphan as they should be.

"I suppose I should not have told them that her father left her nothing, for they do seem to regard all poor children with a certain contempt."

"Yes, Alfred, it has been false training that allows them to act so; but I am determined that they shall treat Alice well, for a more lovely child I never knew."

"She's a good girl, it is true; but, suppose we send her off to school somewhere, and when she comes back they will be older and perhaps treat her better."

"Her income will educate her, will it not?"

"Hardly, for it is but about six hundred a year; but I will manage the rest, and she can go to Madame Holbrook's in New York, and you can get her ready to start with the opening of school in a few weeks."

"Poor child, I feel sorry for her, and I only wish that she could be made to feel that she was as one of our own; but Edith, Mercer, and even Egbert, who should have more manliness about him, would not hear to it, and you allow them to rule."

"Egad, they do run the ranch, as we say on the frontier, for they've taken the reins in their own hands."

"I trust we shall not some day see the fruit of our false training, Alfred; but there is one thing more I would like to ask you."

"Well, Estelle?"

"Now, do not get angry; I have been thinking lately if you should not make some effort to find poor Austin."

"Estelle!" said the colonel, sternly.

"Nay, he has committed no crime that we should not speak of him, and he is along in years now, nearly fifty, you know, and the world may have gone badly with him, and he may be in want, while you told me the other day your legacy from Captain Grayhurst had quadrupled in value since you received it, and you are well able to see that he has enough for his old age."

"Always harping upon Austin Markham, Estelle."

"No, I am doing what justice alone dictates, and you should help him if he is in need, and alive."

"Well, I will see if we can trace him up, and I will supply him liberally if he is in want."

"I thank you, Alfred; but what is all that noise out on the piazza?"

"Hark!"

They both arose and went hastily out to the piazza, where the scene which the reader witnessed met their gaze of astonishment.

Colonel Alfred Markham also wore his beard full, though it was well kept and silken, while the gray hairs had not threaded it or his hair, as they had with Austin Markham.

And yet, in size, in appearance the two were brothers, were strangely alike, though one was dressed in the finest broadcloth, the other was in rags.

True, the vagabond looked much older than the gentleman, for time had not dealt as gently with him it seemed.

And, at a glance, did Alfred Markham recognize his brother, and also, the moment her eyes fell upon him, did Estelle know the man whom she had discarded twenty-five years before for the one by her side?

Was that careworn, ragged, unkempt man the one she had loved?

Such was her thought, and yet she did not turn her back upon him, but sternly rebuked her son Egbert for his insulting words.

And cowed by his mother's unwonted manner, her stern bearing, he shrunk from her as she led Alice Victor into the mansion, for the young girl dearly loved Mrs. Markham, and insisted upon it that she was not much hurt.

To her own room Mrs. Markham led Alice, while Edith followed, she, too, alarmed by what had occurred, and the manner in which her mother had spoken to her brother, while she could not understand her father, so stern, so quick-tempered under most occasions with intruders, had said nothing in reply to his vagabond brother.

"It is nothing, Mamma Markham, so don't be alarmed," said Alice, in her sweet way, as she saw the pale face and quivering lips of Mrs. Markham, and believed that she was frightened for her sake.

Ah! how little the child knew what was then in the heart and brain of the woman.

"Egbert was very naughty to set Nero upon the poor man, and I tried to keep the ugly brute back, when the staff struck me; but it was an accident, and I felt more sorry for the poor old man than I did for myself, for there were tears in his eyes."

"And such eyes! They seemed to blaze with anger and melt in sorrow at the same moment."

"So you recognized him, Mamma Markham, and he is Papa Markham's brother?"

"Yes, my child, he is."

"Poor old man! The world seems to have been unkind to him, for he was so ragged and sad-looking."

"He has had a hard life, I fear, Alice; but my husband, I know, will not see him suffer any, now that he has come back in want; but here is the doctor, and we will know all about the wound you received," and as Mrs. Markham spoke, Edith entered in advance of the physician, and saying spitefully:

"Here she is, doctor—the little girl who tried to play the heroine and save an insolent tramp from Nero's teeth, and got hit with his club, which destroyed all the romance at one fell blow."

But Edith started back, for suddenly her mother confronted her, white-faced, eyes blazing, and lips quivering.

"Edith, go to your room this instant and remain there until I say you can leave it, for speaking thus of this dear child, and one who, in spite of his rags, you shall speak of only with respect."

Edith was taken aback, and deeply mortified, to be thus rebuked by her gentle mother, and especially before the doctor, Alice and a servant, and she said haughtily:

"Mother, I do not—"

"Go, miss, this instant, or leave this house!"

The girl shrunk away in alarm before the spirit of her mother, thoroughly subdued, and returning to Alice Mrs. Markham asked anxiously:

"Doctor, it is not serious, is it?"

"No, for it struck a hard part of Miss Alice's pretty head, for, fortunately, young lady, you have a hard head."

"Had it struck the temple, or back of the ear, it would have been fatal, while, as it is, you will only have to lose a lock or two of your beautiful hair."

"I do not mind that, sir, and I only hope Nero did not bite the old gentleman badly," was the response of the plucky girl, and she submitted to the sewing up of the wound and loss of her red-gold curls without a murmur.

The departure of the doctor, and his having, by force, to dress the wounds of Austin Markham, are known to the reader, whom I shall now ask to accompany me to New York, where Egbert Markham went to pass a few days, as he said it was perfectly unbearable at home to be lectured by his mother, because he spoke of an old vagabond uncle as a tramp, and whom he really did not believe was his father's brother, after all, but an impostor.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CADET'S SECRET.

WHEN Cadet Egbert Markham visited New York, he was wont to enjoy himself to the full bent of his humor, which was to get as much of pleasure, according to his ideas, out of life, as could be bought with money.

He had rented rooms by the year, furnished them with extravagance, and when he anticipated a visit to the metropolis sent word of his coming, and a cook and valet were there ready for him.

He had not expected to visit New York so soon, on this occasion, as all had been so comfortable at home, and he had lately met the ward of a neighbor of Markham Manor, who, in addition to great beauty, was said to be marvelously rich.

But, after the visit of Austin Markham, affairs at the manor had not gone with their accustomed smoothness, for Mrs. Markham had, so to speak, taken the reins in her own hands, whenever reference was made to the "vagabond uncle," and her children had found that she had a will of iron, and could be strangely stern, if need be.

So the young cadet had gone off "until the storm blew over," as he expressed it.

He quickly sought out his servants, however, and settled himself in his luxurious quarters.

And there he sat musing one evening, after having finished his dinner, and building air-castles in the smoke of his fragrant cigar.

Lying back in an easy-chair, in silk evening gown, embroidered slippers and smoking-cap, he certainly was a very handsome young man, one to attract the admiration even of men, and to win the hearts of the fair sex by scores.

He was but twenty-two, and yet he looked older, for the fact was, Egbert Markham was a very fast young man, and not even the iron discipline of West Point had kept him from enjoying himself as he liked.

"Ah me! I must get rid of that little girl in some way, for I believe I am actually in love with Mary Marenzo."

"And no wonder, for she's a brilliant beauty, as keen as a sword with wit, and her inheritance is about a million at the lowest count."

"I've got to settle down some day, and if she'll marry me, and why not? I'll do it after I get my lieutenantcy, for I have a higher aim in my life than to go out to the border and live in camps, pits, and fight red-skins."

"No, I wish the *clat* of a West Point education; I will get my lieutenantcy, resign my commission, and then marry sweet Mary Marenzo."

"But what of Flora Hobart?"

"There's the rub! What a fool I was to be lured by a pretty face and trim form into such an indiscretion."

"I will bring her to the city; she will be dazzled by the sights, and I'll soon find some cause to free myself of her."

"Now there is Alice Victor."

"She is as beautiful as a dream, and if she had the inheritance we supposed, it would have suited me better to have enjoyed life until she grew up, and then have made her my wife."

"That would have given me half a dozen years yet of freedom, while to marry Mary Marenzo I will have to give up my bachelorhood within two years."

"Bah! why is it that Flora Hobart keeps rising before me?"

"Well, she *must* be gotten rid of in some way, and I'll put a detective upon her track to help me do so, once she is in the city."

"I will write her to-night, for I have not written her a line since I left the Point and she'll be most anxious about me."

"Bah! she's a little fool, and I'm another to have— Well, Talbot?"

And the young aristocrat turned as his valet entered.

"A lady to see you, sir."

"A lady who knew I had come to the city this morning?"

"I do not know, sir; but there is a lady in the anteroom to see you," answered Talbot.

"Well, show her in; but, who the deuce she can be I do not know, and there is but one way to find out."

A moment after the door opened, and rising lazily, Egbert Markham confronted a slender, graceful form, dressed in black and wearing a veil that concealed her face.

Talbot was a very discreet servant, and he hastily closed the door, for appearance's sake, and dropped his ear to the keyhole, for his own sake.

Seeing the door close the visitor threw back her veil.

It was a beautiful face, childish, innocent, confiding, and now flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, Egbert, I have found you!" she cried.

"Flora!" broke from the man's lips, with anger and amazement commingled.

"You are angry, Egbert," she said, with quivering voice.

"Yes; I am very angry, for why are you here?"

"I came, Egbert, because my father married that horrible old woman, as I feared he would, and who was always a thorn in my mother's side."

"Upon her dying bed she begged my father not to let me leave the little farm, and never to marry that hateful woman; but he made her his wife two days ago, and her first act was to drive me from home."

"She said she could milk the cows, churn, and do the work there, while I was lazy, and should go out to work for a living."

"She told me, Egbert, that I was a flirt, did nothing but flirt with the cadets, and so she drove me away from my girlhood's home, which she entered as mistress, before my poor mother has been a year dead."

"I packed up my few things, Egbert, took my money which I had hoarded up for years, and bade father good-by, telling him I was going to earn my own living."

"You know Little Nabob, as the cadets call poor little Sandy, the Waif, on account of his free-and-easy way of taking life? Well, he got a horse and buggy at my request, and drove me here, and we arrived to-day."

"I went by Markham Manor, your home, and it is so beautiful—"

"What! did you go there?" cried the cadet, in alarm.

"Oh, no; I did not do aught to compromise you, Egbert, for I waited in the buggy, out in the highway, while Nabob went up and asked if you were at home."

"A servant told him you were in the city, and so I came here, and stopped at a hotel, while remembering the address you gave me I came to see you as soon as Nabob started back to the Point."

"And did you speak with Nabob about me?"

"I only told him that I wished to know if you were at home, as you knew an address in the city that I wanted to get."

"That boy is no fool, Flora."

"No, nor is he one to talk, and especially about me, for I saved his life once, if you will remember, when he swam the river on a wager of ten dollars, and was taken with the cramp when near the shore and was drowning, and I rowed out and drew him into my boat."

"Yes, I remember it, Flora, and I have not forgotten that you came off that night of storm in your little skiff and saved me from drowning, when my little yacht capsized. It was your kindness that night that made me care for you, while your pretty face and form won my admiration and made me make a fool of myself."

"Make a fool of yourself, Egbert?" and the beautiful eyes filled with tears, while the lips quivered.

"Yes, I think I made a fool of myself to marry you secretly, Flora."

"To marry me secretly, Egbert, was wrong; but I urged against it, yet loving you with my whole soul, I yielded to your wish to do so, for you promised to make our marriage public as soon as you graduated."

"I swore not to betray our marriage, and I will keep my word; but did I do wrong, Egbert, in coming to seek my husband when my step-mother drove me from my once happy home?"

"I did not say that you did wrong, Flora, for I am glad you came, as I was just going to invite you to-night to do so."

"But I should not have married you until I knew you better, as your step-mother was right about your flirting with cadets."

"Egbert Markham, what do you mean, sir?" and her eyes flashed with anger.

"I mean that I have heard much of your flirtations, Flora, and wished to get you away from the vicinity of West Point."

"I have done no wrong, and I have spoken to no cadet other than those you introduced to me."

"I was an humble farmer's daughter; but my mother wished me to be a lady, and so sent me off to boarding-school."

"I left before I graduated, on account of her ill health, and it was while she lay dead at home, that fearful stormy night, I saw from the window, when I sat by the side of her coffin, the storm coming up, and you boldly putting forth in the face of it to cross the river."

"Darkness came on, and you were not much more than half-way across, and the storm broke, and I saw your boat go over."

"I left my dead mother, ran to my life-skiff and rowed out to your rescue, not knowing who you were."

"I risked my life to save you, as you know, and had I not rescued you as I did, you would have drowned, for you had been washed away from your upturned boat."

"I took you to the landing nearest the academy, and, as you asked it, never spoke of what I had done, and I returned to my dead mother's side, happy in the thought that I had saved a human life."

"From that day I loved you, and never have I had a dozen words with a cadet, except in your presence, and now in my distress I come to you, your wife, and you tell me you have made a fool of yourself in marrying me."

The girl had spoken in a low, earnest way, gazing him straight in the face, and more in sorrow than anger.

He saw that he was arousing a dangerous spirit in her, and to gain control he must pacify her, so he said pleasantly:

"Flora, you are a little goose, for I only said what I did to tease you, and here I have had a *résumé* of your life and all."

"I am glad you have come, for I wish you here, and you can take painting lessons, for you know you have a talent that way, continue your music, and these will give you enough to do to keep you out of mischief."

"I will get you pleasant rooms, for I have to give up these, and a servant to do your work."

"No, no, Egbert, I can do my own work, and it will but be an extra expense to have a servant; but forgive me, Egbert, if I doubted you, and see how good I will be to make up for it."

"I will study hard, paint, practice my music and singing, do fancy-work, and make myself a most accomplished woman by the time you are ready to acknowledge me as your wife, and you will not be ashamed of me."

Did the innocent, loving wife touch the heart of the aristocratic young cadet by her words and promises?

The question will be answered anon.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOWED.

"My friend, I did not seek to become the head and front of your Secret Service League, but I did hope to be able to ally myself with you, as there is much that is mysterious to me that I wished solved," said Austin Markham, when Chandos, the Shadow Detective, told him that he should be the acknowledged chief of his little band of Secret Service men.

"My dear sir, I feel that you are just the man for the position of leader, while I will be your lieutenant, and serve under you, and, without the cares of leadership can be free to do much better work."

"Besides, you have enriched our treasury more than it has ever been enriched before, in giving this roll of bills, and poverty, I assure you, has kept us back from accomplishing much in a detective way, that we might have done had we had gold to work with," said Chandos.

"What is needed to work with can be found, for I will see to that; but now, tell me what I am to be chief of?"

"Myself and six men comprise my band of Shadow Detectives."

"You can depend upon your men?"

"Each and every one of them, with my life, sir."

"That is a good recommendation to begin with."

"It is deserved, for I studied each man before I took him into my confidence, and I can vouch for them all as I can for myself."

"You are seven, I am eight, and my unknown ally will make nine."

"Yes, sir; but who is your unknown?"

"You must trust me as regards him, for he is to remain unknown up to a time when he can make himself known in his proper character."

"You may call him Fairfax, and I shall be known to you all as Nero."

"As you wish, sir."

"Now, Mr. Chandos, we must have more men."

"More men, sir?" asked the young detective in disguise.

"Yes, and they must be men you can trust, as you do those you have. Do you know such?"

"I perhaps can find four that I know I can depend upon, but to get others I must have time to try them."

"These four have been associated with me in a number of shadowings, and I know them thoroughly."

"Those four will be sufficient, for it will make us just thirteen all told."

"You do not dread thirteen as an unlucky number?"

"Not I, for I am governed by no superstitious fallacies, young man, and I advise you not to be either."

"I am free, very free from superstition, I assure you, sir," said Chandos, with a smile, and then he added:

"But, the four men I refer to are high-priced, sir, and get their price from an agency in the city."

"What do you call high-priced, Mr. Chandos?"

"A hundred a month and all expenses when on duty."

"What do you pay your men?"

"Seventy a month, and expenses on duty out of the city."

"Are those four any better than your men?"

"Not a bit, sir."

"Then pay all one hundred and fifty per month, with all expenses, in the city, or out of it, and promise them a bonus of five per cent. on all money they get by their detective services."

"These are liberal terms, sir, I assure you."

"I mean them to be so."

"Do you think our profits from work will warrant such prices?"

"Oh yes, for there are over three months' pay for the men in that roll of bills now. You, and Fairfax my unknown shadow, and I, will share alike when the end is accomplished."

"You surprise me, sir."

"This world is made up of surprises, my

young friend," was the quiet response, and then the strange man added:

"Now to the work before us."

"Well, sir, what have you on hand that we shall begin on?"

"I shall make my headquarters here, on this old brig, for I prefer it, and you can sail my sloop back to the city and keep her there for our use."

"You can send me up a light skiff, which I can haul on deck here, or lower, when I need to go ashore, and I will give you a list of what I need to make me more comfortable."

"You will report to me as often as necessary, and have your men report to you, or to me, if you are out of the way, for I shall be here most of the time."

"Then I am to know just where you are to be found, and so you had best get quarters in New York, and keep always two men there ready for a call, while each man must leave, in a register, the exact duty he goes on, so that he can be found if wanted."

"You are to be treasurer, and supply the men with expense money and pay salaries—here is another roll of bills for the treasury," and the wanderer took from some hidden pocket another package of bills, similar to the first one, and laid it before the astonished eyes of the young Shadow Detective.

"My dear sir, are you a millionaire in disguise?"

"No, I was a vagabond wanderer, but now I am Captain Nero, Chief of the Shadow Detectives," was the response.

"Now," he continued, "there is work to be done, for I wish you to shadow the home of Colonel Alfred Markham, dwelling upon the Hudson above New York, and report the movements of himself and family."

"Then I desire that you go to work systematically upon your own case, of finding your sister's lost child, and all that you would know."

"Third, I wish you to send me a number of various disguises here, for I have some shadow work for my unknown friend to do, and the sooner he begins the better."

"I shall faithfully and promptly carry out your orders, Captain Nero," said Chandos.

"I feel that you will; and more, I feel that the shadowing work we are to enter upon will bring forth good fruit for some, and wormwood and misery for many of those upon whom our shadow falls."

"Now, Lieutenant Chandos, you have your orders," and Captain Nero bowed, as though to dismiss the subject and his visitor.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHADOW IN THE CHURCH.

"I VERILY believe that girl means to give me trouble if she can, for her eyes snapped fire this morning when she showed me my father's letter, which I had carelessly sent her this morning instead of the one intended for her, and which told me he wished me to marry Mary Marengo, Judge Garlo's ward."

"Whew! but wasn't she angry, for I have always told her my father would not hear to my marrying until I became a captain."

"Well, I have secured her pleasant rooms, supplied her liberally with money, and I hope she will let me alone for awhile and busy herself with her painting and music."

"Then I have introduced to her several of the fastest men about town and put a detective upon her track to trump up some charge against her so I can force her to let me get free from her."

"But let me see; what witness have I to my marriage with her other than the old minister of that country church and his sickly daughter, who has since died—so Flora told me—By Heaven! I have an idea!"

And the handsome but designing young cadet paused in his walk, for he was pacing to and fro in his elegant rooms, as a sudden thought struck him with startling suddenness.

"I can get some one to do it," he added after awhile, pausing in his walk and lost in deepest meditation.

"No; I dare not trust any one, so will do it myself, for then I will know it is well done, and besides I can save the money I would have to pay to one whom I hired for the work, and just now money is a consideration, as I have been going it pretty heavy of late, and the colonel has given me several warnings to go slow."

"That is why he wishes me to marry Mary Marengo, so as to draw upon her income and not on his."

"Well, we shall see; but the first act is to prove I am not married."

And the young man began to make arrangements for a hasty departure from the city, for he called Talbot and bade him pack his handbag for him.

In spite of his recklessness and personal extravagance Egbert Markham was a very close man.

He furnished his rooms luxuriously, dressed well, stinted himself in nothing, and yet spent very little on others.

He was always just "broke" if a friend wished to borrow, and yet he gambled his money away to try and add to his income.

Putting a pistol in his sachel, wearing a suit for roughing it, and with a broad-brimmed slouch hat covering his head Egbert Markham left his rooms, told Talbot he would return the next day, and springing into a carriage that had been ordered for him, drove rapidly away.

The way he took was out of the city, and his destination, after leaving his carriage and taking to horseback, was reached a couple of hours after nightfall.

It was a strange place for such a man to seek by night, for it was an old country church, standing alone, surrounded by its dead, and with the glimmer of a single light, several hundred yards along the highway, showing where was the parsonage.

Turning his horse around the stone wall, Cadet Markham rode to a clump of bushes in the rear of the church and then dismounted.

He then stood gazing upon the quaint structure and the tombs surrounding it, and which stood out like grim specters, watching the invasion of this sacred spot by the foot of man.

"This is a dismal place by night, and I half wish I had paid some one else for this work, and not come myself."

"There! I have left my pistol in my sachel at the stable where I got my horse."

"But what good would a pistol do me against ghosts, if such things be?"

"I must not hesitate now, but go on."

So he moved off from the shelter of the trees, picking his way among the graves, and soon came to the front door of the church.

Taking from his pocket a bunch of skeleton keys, which he had procured before leaving the city, he proceeded to fit one in the lock, and with little effort succeeded, for the door opened at his pressure.

Lighting a piece of candle he stepped into the vestibule, and gazed about him.

It was as silent as the graves without, and the man paused, as though frightened at his suspicious act.

"Ah! I forget that this candle light may be seen, and cause investigation."

"I must make my way in the darkness, and light the candle simply to find that for which I have come."

So saying, he walked slowly up the church aisle.

It was moonlight without, and the light within was sufficient for him to see his way distinctly.

Grim, solemn, silent the place was, and Cadet Markham started at the creaking of a board beneath his feet.

Reaching the chancel rail he stepped over it, placed his hand upon the knob and opened the door that led into the vestry-room.

It was a small room, but a quiet, restful place, with its table strewn with manuscript sermons, books of reference, and showing where the pastor did his work.

There were bookcases on one side, a closet set in the wall and having a massive door, and lighting his candle the cadet turned toward this.

After some effort he opened the door with his skeleton-keys, and a short search seemed to gain for him that for which he had come, for he took out a large book, glanced over its pages, uttered an exclamation of triumph, and tore a leaf quickly therefrom.

As he did so his candle went out suddenly.

"Great God! there was not a breath of wind, and I certainly did not blow it out," he cried in excitement, and hastily he returned the book to its place, locked the closet door and started to go out the vestry way.

"No, I left the front door ajar, so must close it, and thus cover up my tracks," he muttered, adding, as his foot was on the step leading into the chancel:

"I hate to go back through this dismal church again."

But he straightened up, as though to gain courage, and stepped boldly into the chancel.

But one step had the cadet made, when a cry of horror broke from his lips, for standing in the chancel, with one hand stretched out warningly toward him, was a shadowy form that barred his way.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOST RECORD.

EGBERT MARKHAM was no coward, and he was little given to superstitious beliefs; but there, in that lonely church, surrounded by the graves of a century of dead, alone, and bent on a sinful mission, he was wholly unnerved by the sight that met his gaze.

He stopped short, and feelings of horror flooded his heart and brain so fiercely that he clasped his hands to his head and staggered backward, as though about to fall.

But he exerted his strong will, gained mastery over himself, and seemed about to spring upon the shadowy form that confronted him, one hand held out in warning to depart, for it pointed toward the door.

The moonlight streamed in through the stained windows of the church, revealing distinctly the

solemn outlines within, while there, in the chancel stood the silent, motionless form.

What could it be? Was it really a spirit of the sacred structure warning him away from defiling its sacredness by his evil presence?

He was standing like a statue, his hands clasped upon his forehead and his eyes riveted upon the shadow, phantom, ghost, or whatever it might be.

"I will solve this mystery, or I must go mad," he surmised, in a voice that was hoarse and quivering.

But just then, as though anticipating his intention, the shadowy specter moved toward him.

This was too much for even his strong nerves, and with a cry of horror he bounded over the chancel-rail and fled along the aisle toward the front door.

As he reached the door that divided the church from the vestibule he glanced over his shoulder, and there, following like his own shadow, was the weird form.

Out of the church he dashed, out into the open air and streaming moonlight and through the grave-dotted yard he fled with the speed of the wind.

Reaching his horse he threw himself into the saddle, and sinking the spurs deep rode from the dread spot as fast as the animal could carry him.

It was half an hour before he slackened his pace, and then he came to a halt.

"Great God! am I a coward?" he fairly groaned.

"If I am, it is not man that I fear; but in the name of Heaven, what was that weird being that came upon me?"

"It was no joke, for who was there to play so frightful a joke upon me?"

"The old preacher dwells some distance from the church, and the sexton lives in the village."

"All was dark then, I opened the doors myself, I found the register, and I tore the leaf, so fatal to me, from it, an— Good God! I have lost it!"

He felt in his pockets, even to those in his vest, for the page he had torn from the register.

But he did not have it.

"It is gone! that is certain."

"It seems that I put it in this pocket of my coat, and then I recall the fact that I had it in my hand when I saw that specter."

"I must not lose it. I must retrace my way and find it."

"But that grim shadow!"

"Bah! I must not be frightened off by that."

"I will carry my pistol in my hand, and test powder and lead on the specter this time, for I must have that leaf, as thereon rests my safety in the future."

"Ah! it is clouding up and will rain, while this rising wind will blow the leaf away if I have dropped it outside the church."

"Let me see, I take this road to the right," and he turned back, guiding his horse into a road that led to the right, yet was parallel almost with the one to the left.

"Ha! some one comes, and he is on horseback, too," and the form of a horse and rider came toward him at a canter.

"I hope it is not the specter on horseback," he said, with a shudder.

Soon the horseman was almost upon him, and he beheld him draw rein to a walk, so that they passed each other slowly.

"How far is it to the village, sir?" asked Egbert Markham, anxious to hear the sound of a human voice, after his weird experience of a short while before.

But though the horseman was within two feet of him, and he had spoken politely, no response was returned to his question, and the one he addressed passed by in silence.

"Pardon me, sir, but will you kindly tell me how far it is to the village?" called out Egbert Markham, in a loud voice.

But the horseman still vouchsafed no reply, and gazing after him in amazement, the cadet saw him turn into the left-hand road, when he was cut off from view by the timber.

"Well, that fellow is either deaf, or a sullen fool, not to answer," and so saying the cadet rode on at a slow pace toward the church he had left in such haste.

He had ridden over two miles from it, before he turned back, and yet did not seem desirous of hastening, for he carefully searched the road as he went along, hoping to find the lost page.

But the church came in sight, and he had not found it.

The wind was now blowing strong, and the sky had become overcast with clouds, while the thunder of an approaching storm muttered ominously in the distance.

Seeing a clump of bushes, in which to hide his horse, he turned into them, fastened the animal securely, and approached the church, going over the way he had left it, to look for the lost record.

As he reached the front door he paused, to nerve himself for the ordeal, for he wished to be ready for the grim specter, should it again cross his path.

He had left the door open in his flight, that he distinctly remembered; but now it was closed.

As he was about to place his skeleton-key in the lock, the door swung open, as though by some supernatural agency.

He started back in amazement; but realizing how important it was that he should obtain the record, he stepped in, holding his pistol in his hand.

Approaching the second door he opened it and walked into the aisle.

He could almost hear his heart beat, and the wind howled mournfully without, while the moon, obscured by clouds, did not pour its light into the church as before.

All was most solemn and weird-like.

But on he went up the aisle, over the chancel rail, and everywhere he searched for the lost leaf.

He lighted matches to aid him, and yet could find no trace of it.

"I dropped it outside, and the wind has blown it away, while the rain will soon destroy it, or deface the writing," he said, and he hastened to leave the church.

As he reached the outer door, and was about to draw it to after him, it suddenly closed behind him with great force, and a cry escaped his lips as he sprang off from the stone steps.

"That church is haunted, that is certain," he cried, and retracing his way to where he left his horse, he mounted, just as the rain began to patter down in heavy drops.

But he had come prepared for any weather, and so rode on his way back toward the town where he had gotten his horse, and left his team.

"Curse the animal! does he see ghosts too?" he cried, as the animal snorted loudly at times, and went along as though greatly alarmed from some cause.

It was just after dawn when he rode into the town, and with the increasing light he gazed in wonder at the horse he rode.

"By heaven! what does this mean?"

"This horse was certainly a blood bay when I rode away on him last night, and now he is jet-black!"

With a pale face, for he felt really alarmed, the cadet looked at his horse, and had come to the conclusion that he was mistaken in the color of the horse, when, as he rode into the livery-stable, the man there called out:

"You didn't bring Bay Bessie back, sir."

"Has any accident befallen her?"

"This, then, is not the horse I rode away last night?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, sir; I gave you Bay Bessie, and this is a black mare."

"Well, I do not know how a mistake of that kind could be made."

"Doubtless they saddled the wrong horse for you, sir, where you stopped."

"Yes; for this is the saddle and bridle I took away," he said, in a mysterious way.

"Oh, yes, sir; the saddle and bridle are all right."

"Is not this animal as good as the other?"

"Yes, sir; and better, if she is as good as she looks."

"Well, keep her, and if any one comes here with the other find out who he is and all about him so you can answer me when I write you, for I will take your name and address."

"Now get my team ready while I go into the tavern and get some breakfast."

But the cadet did not enjoy his breakfast, though it was a tempting one, and the truth was that he was mystified and wretched.

He had gained the record and lost it.

He had seen what certainly appeared to be a ghost.

His horse had been mysteriously replaced by another, and, altogether, Egbert Markham was unhappy and felt that his expedition by night to the haunted church had turned out badly, and it was with a heart full of bitterness, a brain full of worry that he started upon his return to the city, sending the two horses attached to his buggy along at a rattling pace.

CHAPTER XVI.

A "JOKE" ON "THE GUV'NOR."

It was the day after his return from his mysterious trip to the haunted church, and Cadet Markham was puffing vigorously at a fragrant cigar, as he sat in his rooms after dinner.

He had told Talbot, his valet, that he was "at home" to but one person, a gentleman whom he expected, and who would give the name of "Mr. Sharp."

It was not very long before Talbot broke in upon his young master's reverie, which seemed disturbed by the way with painful thoughts, to judge by the way he gnawed his cigar, and reported that Mr. Sharp had arrived.

Mr. Sharp entered, and was a dignified, full-bearded man, with a face that was expressive and determined.

"Mr. Sharp, I am glad you have come, for, as I told you when I called at your agency, I have some important work for you to do; be seated, please, and there is brandy, or wine, if you prefer it."

"Thank you, but I do not drink, Mr. Markham," was the reply of the "gentleman in black,"

for he was dressed from head to foot in sable garments, as though in mourning for some dead loved one, a suspicion that his solemn face carried out the better.

"Well, what I wish you to do is to go up the river to Blanktown, not far from which stands an old church, in the outskirts of a small village."

"I desire you to find out all you can regarding anything of an important nature that has occurred there of late, and ask permission to see the register, or record, of the little parish."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you to bring me an exact copy of all of the marriages, deaths, births and other records, kept in the book, for the year of 18—, with names, dates in full and all."

"Will I be allowed to copy from the register, sir?"

"That you must discover, and, whether allowed or not, you must get it in some way, and copy what I desire."

"Here is your pay in advance, and, as you see I am liberal with you, you must do your best for me."

"I will, sir, for you are indeed most generous."

"And, Mr. Sharp, I wish you to stop in Blanktown, at the livery stable of the main tavern there and find out if they have a horse by the name of Bay Bessie, that was ridden out by a gentleman who returned a black horse in her stead."

"I'll see all about her, Mr. Markham, as you desire," was the answer of the detective.

"Now, Mr. Sharp, when you return I will have some other work for you, and you may be assured that you will always be paid most liberally, so what you do for me do with dispatch and do your best."

"I will, sir, for I certainly have nothing to complain of in the payments."

"I will report as soon as I can, sir."

"Good-night," and the business-like Secret Service man departed, and Cadet Markham was left alone once more with his thoughts.

At last he muttered:

"The governor writes me he will be down tomorrow, and wishes me to breakfast with him at his hotel at eleven."

"Now this means that he will be down today, but does not wish to see me until tomorrow."

"He must have his little game once a month, it seems, though why he has not learned a lesson I do not know, for he is sure to lose at cards, and generally picks up some sharper who fleeces him out of a few thousands."

"Ha! a thought strikes me!"

"As the governor will play, and playing must lose, why should his son not be the winner?"

"This is a brilliant idea of mine, and I will try and carry it into execution this night, for I am here to find him at Carlo's gambling den, for that is where he always goes."

"Carlo asked me why it was the governor always made it a rule to play once a month, and invariably lose?"

"Why he throws away twenty thousand a year on his losses, and then frowns and lectures me because I cannot live on his allowance of six thousand."

"But it will not be thrown away this time if I can help it, so here goes."

The young cadet arose as he spoke, stood a moment in thought, and then called to his valet:

"Talbot!"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to go on a little masquerading to-night, so fix me up in that gray wig and whiskers I had for the private theatricals at the Lathrops'."

"Yes, sir."

A suit was brought out, such as a gentleman of the "old school" might have worn, a pair of gray side-whiskers, with mustache, and a wig of hair that was turning white.

Talbot seemed an adept at the art of making up one in disguise, and, when the cadet had put on a pair of gold spectacles, taken a gold-headed cane in hand, and donned his high hat, no one would have ever recognized him as the young man of twenty-two.

So, bending his erect form slightly he went out and made his way to the most fashionable gambling hell then in the city.

His courtly appearance gained him admission, and going up to the landlord, a Spanish gentleman that had been, but who, meeting with reverses through the gaming-table, had devoted his talents to ruining others in a like way—

"Is Colonel Markham here this evening, sir?" asked the disguised cadet.

"He dropped in half an hour ago, sir, and said he would return as soon as he had made a call."

"Thank you, sir," and the young cadet amused himself for some time about the different salons, until at last he espied his father enter.

Egbert Markham knew just who to pretend to be, and remembering the name of an officer he had once known slightly, and yet had not seen for many years, he walked up to the colonel, and said, bluntly:

"Hello, Markham, how are you?"

Colonel Markham took the outstretched hand, while he said:

"Pardon me for not recognizing one who appears to be an old friend."

"Have you forgotten Boyd Hall, of the Fifth Artillery?"

"No, indeed, Hall, I have not, and I am glad to meet you again; but you have changed strangely, and are so different from what I expected to find you."

"Time makes wonderful changes in us all, Markham; but you hold your own wonderfully; but then you are very rich, I believe, and have surely given up the toil of a soldier's life."

"Yes, I have nothing to complain of, I assure you; but when did you reach town?"

"Only to-day, and drifting across no friends, ran in here to while away a few hours in a game, if I could find a separate partner, for I will not gamble with strangers, and, as it is, merely play for the amusement of it."

"As I do also, for somehow I get certain fevers for gambling."

"I once dreamed three nights in succession that I would lose largely in gambling, and then win a fortune by it, and I am superstitious fool enough to believe in charms, so play whenever I come to the city, though so far I have lost."

"And my luck is seldom much to boast of."

"Come, will you join me?"

"With pleasure," and the two sought a private room, wine and refreshments were ordered, and a game of cards was begun.

With varying success it lasted until long after midnight, and then the disguised cadet arose from table with five thousand dollars of his father's money in his pocket.

"Ah! it is nearly dawn, and I had no idea it was so late."

"I'll hope to be able to remain in the city tomorrow night, colonel, and give you a chance to redeem yourself."

"Good-night," and the two parted, while the reckless young cadet went to his room, and throwing his pile of bills upon the table said with a laugh:

"Now that is clear gain, and I have just anticipated a few thousand that were to have been mine some day."

"Ha! ha! ha! that was a clever joke on the governor and no mistake," and chuckling at his good fortune, Egbert Markham wrote on his slate the hour at which he wished Talbot to call him, and turned in for the night, feeling that he had done a very clever thing to win money as he had from his father, whom he had "taken in," in more senses than one.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN PROPRIA PERSONA.

THE next morning, sharp on the hour, Egbert Markham was at his father's hotel.

He had freshened himself up, and looked his best, and was ushered into the colonel's room, for the latter was just making his toilet, having slept late.

"Ah, my son, I am glad to see you on time, and you are looking bright as a lark."

"Yes, father, good hours freshen a man up wonderfully; but how are you, and all at home?"

"I feel a trifle weary this morning, for I sat up late with a friend, and at home all goes well, though your mother's nature seems changed since the coming back of that vagabond brother of mine."

"That is why I ran off, sir, for a few days, for mother made us stand in line when his name was mentioned, and Edith and Mercer caught it severely when they were wont to speak of our trampish relative with disrespect; but where on earth has he been, father, to become the Wandering Jew that he is in appearance?"

"Heaven only knows, my son; but he left me in anger, refused my offer of an income for him, and, without one word to us in all these years, you see how he returns."

"But I have had fear of Daisy, for she has been ill with fever since you left, though is better now."

"Caused by the tramp's blow?"

"Partially, and worry that such a scene should have occurred, while she seemed to feel deeply for your mother, and it caused Edith to call her a hypocrite, and the result was a crying scene and her sickness."

"Why do you not transfer your guardianship of the girl to some one else, father, for she is an expense to you, I am well aware?"

"Yes, but for the sake of her father I am content to care for her, be the expense what it may, and I shall now see about placing her at a fashionable school here, for that is partly the object of my coming."

"Madam Beaumont's is about the best institution in the city."

"No, I shall send her to Madam Holbrook's, which I deem better."

"But Sis was educated there, and she will not like it if Alice follows in her footsteps."

"I cannot help that, for your mother has decided upon Madam Holbrook's, and there she goes; but come, I am ready now, so we will go to breakfast," and the father and son, certainly a very handsome pair, descended to the breakfast rooms.

They had about finished their breakfast, when

a gentleman, tall, soldierly in bearing, and gazing fixedly at Colonel Markham passed near.

Suddenly he turned and advanced toward the table, while he said:

"Can I be mistaken, sir, in believing you to be my old comrade in arms, Alfred Markham?"

"That is my name, sir, but I do not recall you I am forced to say."

"My beard changes me greatly, as has also the many years that have passed since last we met."

"I am Major Boyd Hall, Markham."

"Impossible, sir!" cried the colonel, while Egbert started as he heard the name.

"No, Markham, it is not impossible, but true, for I am Boyd Hall."

"Egad, it is so, for I recall you now as you speak to me, and that I was deeply imposed upon last night by one who pretended to be none other than yourself."

"I am at a loss to understand you, Markham."

"The truth is, I went around to Carlo's Cage, as a fashionable gambling hell here is called, to while away a few hours at cards."

"I there met a person with gray hair and English whiskers, whose bearing was that of a gentleman and a soldier."

"He introduced himself as none other than you, and we played together for hours, talking the while over old times, and he, by the way, coming off largely the winner."

Major Boyd Hall seemed amazed at what he heard, and then, after a moment of thought, he said:

"Markham, you have been imposed upon by some sharper, who knew I had just arrived in town, and was aware of our former friendship."

"Did he win much from you?"

"Yes, a few thousand."

"This is infamous, and we must find the rascal, so come with me to a detective agency, and we will put Secret Service men upon his track."

The colonel then remembered the existence of Egbert, who had been nervously twirling his mustache, and introduced his son, after which the three started out to hunt up a detective, entering a door where there was a sign with the following legend:

"CHANDOS' SECRET SERVICE SEADOWS."

"All Detective Work Promptly Executed."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S REPORTS.

OUTWARDLY no change had come over the old brig at her anchorage, though inwardly there had.

A light skiff was upon her deck, which could be swung over her side into the water by the strength of one man, and drawn inboard again, and this was the only innovation for the eye to fall upon when standing upon the brig's deck.

In the cabin, however, a change had come, for it had become more homelike, as there was an air of comfort about it.

There was a carpet upon the floor, rat-holes had been filled up, and some good furniture had taken the place of the worn out.

Two of the state-rooms had been put in good order, and a third was used as a combined kitchen and eating-room.

In the cabin sat the one who had made this old wreck his home.

It was Austin Markham, the wanderer, known then as Captain Nero.

His appearance had little changed, for he yet wore that look of poverty, of the vagabond, and his clothes were tattered and forlorn.

His face seemed a trifle sterner, maybe, and when in repose, his eyes were strangely sad, as though he looked into the past oftener than toward the future, and always to find there only saddest memories to gaze upon.

So there he sat, some two weeks after his compact with Chandos, the Shadow Detective, and before him were various papers, which he had been looking over and making certain marks upon, or writing a few words as an addenda, or memorandum.

It was night and the lamp above him threw a bright light down upon his massive, unkempt head as he suddenly dropped his face in his hands and sat the very picture of woe, for it is a sad sight to see a gray head bowed in sorrow, in pain or in shame.

On deck all was perfectly quiet, and only the occasional hoot of an owl from the woods and the wash of the waves upon the shore could be heard.

"Well, I am embarked upon this strange enterprise, and I must see it to the end, be it bitter or sweet."

"Time was when I expected never again to visit this land to come face to face with the past, and yet that indescribable longing to see her face once more to see her children, and to know what use he had made of his heritage was stronger than I could resist, and I have come."

"I have seen her face, I have seen her chil-

dren, and I know pretty well what he has done with the money he got by the strange will of Uncle Grayhurst."

"And seeing has made my heart ache, has made me revengeful, and more, it has made me more determined to prove I am not so low in the world as to be utterly despised— Ha! a step on deck!"

And the wanderer arose and stepped to the companionway, for his keen ear had detected a footfall over his head.

"It is Fairfax, Captain Nero," said a voice, and a man entered.

He was a man of striking appearance, fashionably dressed, wearing a long, black beard, and with the air of one who took the world as it came.

"Ah, my friend, I am glad you have come, and you doubtless have some report to make worth my hearing."

"But your disguise is most perfect."

"It has to be, Captain Nero, for I have no desire to be recognized and sent back to my cell in that accursed prison."

"True; but be seated and let me hear your report."

The convict, for he it was, sat down and said in his deliberate way:

"Well, sir, I revisited the old haunts and found my artist studio just as I had left it, for, strange to say, some one pays the rent and allows nothing to be disturbed therein."

"This is strange indeed; but could you not find out who did this?"

"No, sir."

"I should think you might."

"Not unless the landlord is deceiving me, and he says that after my arrest he received a letter containing money to defray any bill that might come against me, and thereby prevent the seizure of what I had there in the way of paintings and furniture."

"He said that the money came anonymously, and more, he had received each month the amount of rent due."

"He told me this gratuitously, for I pretended to be in search of a studio, and rather liking the locality of my old rooms, told him I would take those."

"Then it was he made known my history to me, and how the rooms were kept, adding that it was strange, as I had been sentenced for life."

"This is a strange circumstance; but is there no one you can suspect of doing this for you?"

"No, sir."

"Pardon me, but had you no lady-love?"

The man did not blush at the question, but turned pale, while he answered slowly:

"Yes, sir, I had a sweetheart, one I loved with my whole soul; but she has since married my cousin, Harvey Hammond, and of course she could not be guilty of so strange a kindness to me."

"Hardly; but what of your cousin?"

"He got the heritage that was to be mine, sir, after I was sent to prison for life, and lives in grand style with the wife I hoped I would have claimed as my own."

"I see; but does he live in the old home, where dwelt your relative?"

"Where he was murdered?"

"Yes."

"No, sir."

"Ah! well, what other discoveries did you make, Fairfax?"

"That there are very few who did not believe me guilty of the murder."

"I see; but there is much for you to do, so start out again, this time in a different disguise, I would advise, and endeavor to find out all you can of your cousin's life, his wife's, why he does not live in your kinsman's home, what he does by day and night, and who it is that pays your rent so strangely."

"Remember, you are engaged upon this secret service for yourself, to prove your innocence, and you can do so, I believe, and I will help you all in my power, so spare no expense, thought or time, for if you did not murder your kinsman, some one else did, and the guilty one, not the innocent should suffer."

"Here is more money, you may need it," and handing the escaped convict a roll of bills the latter left the cabin, and Captain Nero was again alone.

Entering a light skiff alongside, Fairfax rowed away, pausing in the entrance to the basin, a boat going in, and containing several persons.

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that?" came from one who sat in the stern of the boat coming in.

"The Nero," was the reply of Fairfax, and he passed on in silence, his reply seemingly satisfying the challenger, and he held on his way toward the brig, which he boarded, leaving his crew still at their oars.

Entering the cabin he was met by Captain Nero, who beheld before him what appeared to be a young sailor, with blonde hair and whiskers, but whom, in spite of his disguise he recognized, as he said:

"Well, Chandos, I am glad to see you."

"Sit down; but did you see a man leave the brig just now?"

"Yes, sir, I met him going out of the inlet

and challenged, and got the password 'Nero' in response."

"Yes, it was my unknown detective; but what have you to report?"

"Colonel Markham and his son, Egbert, are both away from home at present, the former stopping at the Astor House in the city, and the latter at his rooms up-town."

"At home are Mrs. Markham, her daughter, Edith, her younger son, Mercer, and a ward of Colonel Markham's whose name is Alice Victor, and the latter has been quite ill, but is all right now."

"Did you learn the nature of her illness?" quickly asked Captain Nero.

"A tramp came to the house, I heard, and Cadet Markham set his dog upon him, and endeavoring to hold the brute back, the young girl was dragged within reach of a blow aimed for the dog."

"It laid her up for awhile, but was not very severe, I learned from a servant whose tongue I oiled with gold."

"And what of Colonel Markham's and his son's visit to New York?"

"They went alone, the youth first, and just why I could not ascertain; but my men are on the case, and also in a strange case for Colonel Markham, who it seems went to Carlo's to gamble, met there, as he supposed, an old army officer friend, and lost over five thousand dollars in a game with him."

"The next morning he met Major Boyd Hall, in propria persona, at the hotel, and an explanation showed Markham that he had been deceived, and so he came to our agency and got me to take the case to find the swindler, and both the colonel and Major Hall will pay well for it."

"Then work it up, for in doing so you may get some valuable information for our better use."

"But what of young Markham's life in the city?"

"He is a sly one, sir, and very rapid, I assure you."

"Any woman in the case?"

"Yes, sir, he has several strings to his bow; but he is most interested in a little beauty who has her own apartments, living there alone with her servant."

"Find out all about her, Chandos; but is there aught else to report?"

"I hope soon there will be, sir, for I have my men upon young Markham's track, and I believe he is living a double life, for he is certainly interested in some way in this young beauty I spoke of, while he is engaged, I learn, to Miss Mary Marengo, an heiress, and ward of Judge Carlo, who lives near Markham Manor."

"Well, find out if such engagement really exists, and also just who this young ward of Colonel Markham's is."

"Now, I will accompany you to the city, for I desire to make a call on young Markham myself," said Captain Nero, to the evident surprise of Chandos.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND.

AGAIN is Cadet Egbert Markham seated in his elegant rooms alone, and after dinner, enjoying his cigar while he leans back in his easy-chair, lost in deep reverie.

"I must get rid of Flora Hobart in some way, by fair means or foul, for since my father's return home he seems more than ever determined that I shall marry Mary Marengo, and I am equally as willing, only this little act of indiscretion, my marriage to Flora, rises before me, and I do not care to do that which will place me behind iron bars."

"True, I have not asked Miss Marengo yet, but I suppose there will be no trouble on that score."

"She is a brilliant girl, witty, and yet inclined to satire and almost vicious repartee, so that I half fear her; but then women are easily tamed when they meet their master, and I flatter myself I am the master of many."

"But to Flora first."

"She is as sly as a fox, and dodges every trap I set for her, as though she knew all about them, while Talbot says she has called three times, and seems not to believe his statement that I have gone out of town— Well, Talbot?"

"A boy to see you, sir, with a letter, which he will not deliver to me, and he says it is most important."

"Show him in, then; but what can it be?"

Just then a youth entered, and in an awkward way handed Egbert a letter, while he said:

"A gal give me that to give to you, and said as how you'd pay me."

The youth was freckle-faced, red-headed and ill clad, but his eyes were bright, and he seemed not such a fool as he looked.

"Who was the girl, boy?"

"Guess she tells you inside," was the reply.

"There is no name, only the number as an address."

"Maybe she didn't know your name; but she told me to give it to the young gent living here, and that softly in livery told me he was the gent

himself; but I know a gent when I see him, if I is red-headed."

The cadet smiled and opened the envelope, and instantly his face changed, while he said:

"My boy, you go back to the girl and tell her that the gentleman was out of town, and you left the note with his servant."

"It costs something to make me lie," said the boy.

"Here is a five-dollar bill for you; but where did you get this note?"

"From the gal."

"And where is she now?"

"Right before you, Cadet Egbert Markham," was the reply.

"Great God! Flora!" and the cadet was upon his feet, his face white with rage.

"Yes, Cadet Markham, I have come in disguise, and thus found out that, for some reason, you lie to me," was the calm reply of the disguised girl, who with her face freckled by paint blotches, her red wig and boy's attire, certainly was completely metamorphosed from the beautiful Flora Hobart who had captivated the young cadets by the score.

"I have a motive in wishing to be known as being out of town, and you have no right to question my acts, Flora."

"You are mistaken, sir, for I have the right of a wife, and where you live apart from me, as you do, I at least demand the right to know that you are not deceiving me, and so I came in this disguise, for I read human nature well enough to know that your valet spoke falsely in saying you were out of town."

Cadet Markham was in a quandary.

He felt that there were claws beneath the velvet demeanor of the young girl, and that he must be more than careful.

To oppose her then would be to cause a scene, but to affect love and make up a plausible story, would pour oil on troubled waters, and so he decided upon the latter course, until he could get a more firm grip upon her.

So he said, in an injured tone:

"Flora, I am sorry you doubt my love and my honesty of purpose, and force me to explain now, what I would have told you in the end."

"The fact is, the commandant at the Point has heard a rumor that you left your home about the time I got my sick leave, and he has set a watch upon me."

"I gave out that I was out of town, up in the mountains fishing, and did not wish to be seen on the street, even by night, so dared not call on you."

"When this rumor had blown over, I intended to come and see you, and ask you to make a visit to some neighboring State for awhile, until I could graduate, after which I will claim you as my wife."

"But you do not trust me, I see, and come here in disguise to watch me."

"Forgive me, Egbert, my husband; but my life is such a wretched one, for I am not acknowledged to be your wife, and must live here in hiding, as it were, while I am believed to be what I am not, by those who suspect that I left the Point with you," and the tears filled the beautiful eyes.

"Don't cry, pet, or the tears will wash your freckles off, and you'll be recognized as a girl and be arrested for masquerading."

"Now go home, and be a good girl, and trust in me for awhile, and all will be well."

Thus they parted, and as Talbot showed the supposed freckle-faced urchin out he admitted another visitor.

It was the somber-looking detective, who had gone up to Blanktown to see what rumors were afloat there regarding the old Haunted Church.

"Ah, I am glad to see you, though I expected you back sooner," said the cadet, as the detective entered the room.

"I go slow, sir, but sure, and I have come to make my report," was the answer.

"Which I will be glad to hear; be seated, please, and tell me what you discovered at Blanktown."

"Nothing more than the ordinary gossip, sir, always circulating in such a village."

"I asked regarding the old church, and was told that it was haunted, for long years ago its pastor had been found dead there one night, seated in his vestry-room."

"There were no marks of violence upon him, and he sat by his table, as though asleep, so it was thought that he had died of heart disease."

"Still there was a suspicion of murder, when the church funds could not be found, and it was known that the pastor had charge of them."

"Well, I do not care for this rumor of the old church, Mr. Sharp," said Egbert, impatiently.

"I merely give you the story, sir, to show you that the villagers believe the old church to be haunted."

"I see; but did you go there?"

"I did, sir."

"And see the register?"

"Yes, sir."

"With the permission of the clergyman?"

"No, sir, for I deemed it best that no one should know of my seeing it, so I went by night, and alone."

"Hal and did you see a ghost there?"

"No, sir."

"But the register?"

"I carried keys with me, and I saw the register; but the pages, containing the registrations on the dates to which you referred, have been torn out."

"Torn out?" asked Egbert, with well-feigned surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"This is strange."

"So I thought, sir."

"You are sure about it?"

"Certain."

"You saw the torn leaves?"

"No, for it was neatly done, and but for searching for those dates would not have been noticed, except by close examination."

"But, strange to say, sir, I found the leaf that fitted in the book."

"What! you found it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"It was on my return, when I passed the church by day."

"I saw on the roadside a piece of paper, and dismounting, picked it up."

"It was the identical missing leaf from the register, I am sure, and seemed to have been wet, as you perceive," and the detective handed over the sheet of paper he took from his pocket.

One glance at it, and Egbert Markham's face flushed with triumph, for he felt that he held the proof of his marriage in his hands, and the loss of which he had been most anxious about.

"I am glad to get this, Mr. Sharp, and I will pay you liberally, while I will also give you some other work to do."

"Thank you, sir; but there is one thing more."

"Well?"

"The horse."

"Ah, yes; what of Bay Bessie?"

"She is at the stables, sir."

"Indeed! and who brought her?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Did you not ask?"

"Yes, sir; but she was found in the stall one morning, and the black horse was gone, while her mane and tail were all braided up, as they say is done, when the witches ride a horse."

"Nonsense," cried Egbert, but he paled at the same time, for here was more mystery regarding his midnight ride to the Haunted Church.

But he asked the detective a few more questions, and then dismissed him, well paid for his services, and with the promise to engage him again.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TWO VISITORS.

It was the evening following the return of the detective who had found the lost record, and Talbot answered the bell to find there a person in whose face he seemed about to close the door with a bang.

But this he was prevented from doing, by a sudden movement of the visitor, who said:

"Not so fast, my man, for in spite of my wolfish appearance you can answer a polite question."

There was something commanding in the appearance of the man, and it impressed Talbot, who said:

"Well, what do you want?"

"Is your master at home?"

"Who do you wish to see?"

"Your master."

"His name?"

"Cadet Egbert Markham."

"No, he is out of town."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"Are you as sure as you were?" and a ten-dollar bill was placed in Talbot's hand.

"Well, he was out of town."

"And now?"

"Is in town."

"I thought so."

"What do you want with him?"

"To see him."

"Then sit on the steps yonder and wait and see him go by."

"Is he not in?"

"No."

"Guess again," and a five-dollar note was placed in Talbot's hand.

"He's in."

"I thought so."

"But he won't see you."

"How do you know?"

"He gave orders never to admit beggars."

"Well, which is the beggar, you or I?"

"You are not as poor as you look, are you?"

"Appearances are often deceitful; but go and tell your master that an old gentleman wishes to see him."

"And when he sees I have lied to him he will kick me."

"That is so, for I don't look the gentleman, do I?"

"No, you are not the picture of one."

"Well, tell him that an old man, who has something of importance to communicate to him, wishes to see him; but if he asks you to describe me, don't do it right," and another bill was forthcoming from the ragged clothes somewhere.

Then Talbot disappeared and soon returned with information that his master would see the visitor, adding:

"You'd never gotten in but for me, for I told him I thought you was a detective in disguise."

"And how do you know that I am not?"

"That's so, and you may be, for the master has had much to do with detective folks of late."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what reason?"

"I can't tell, for I am not supposed to know; but I know a Secret Service man when I see him, and I know a girl, even if she is in boys' clothes."

"I see; but you don't know me."

"I'm not sure, for if you were a detective you'd hardly give me money to see the master."

"Well, show me your master's room, and let me tell you now that I have a bad habit of firing bullets through keyholes, so don't get your ear too close to one when I am about."

Talbot looked hurt at the hint that he would do such a thing, but said nothing, and led the way to the cadet's rooms.

At a glance of the visitor Egbert Markham was upon his feet, while he said, sternly:

"You here, sir?"

"Yes, nephew, I thought I would drop in and ask about the little girl I hit with my staff, for I have been anxious about her," was the reply.

"She is better, in fact, all right; but I almost wish you had killed her, so that you might have hanged for her murder."

"Now be off."

"Not until we have had a little talk, nephew, for, as you see, I am a poor man, and your surroundings prove that you take life most easily, feeding on the fat of the land and living in luxury."

"You wish to beg, I suppose?"

"I think I am a deserving object, Egbert, and I see no reason why you should be unkind to me."

"There is a reason, for I am a gentleman, and you are a vagabond, low, ragged and insolent, and I cannot bring myself to believe that the blood in my veins is the same as that in your own."

"It is true, nephew."

"I do not believe it, though my silly mother does, and she forces her children to speak respectfully of even such an old bundle of rags as you are; but she is a fool for doing so, and—"

"Hold, boy! dare to call your mother a fool, and I will brain you with my staff," and the voice of Austin Markham rung like a bugle.

The cadet started back, in mingled awe, amazement and rage, while his vagabond visitor continued:

"I called to see you, that I might learn if you really had a bad heart, and I have found you vile enough to call your own mother a fool."

"I am content, and I bid you good-night, while I would spurn any gold you might offer me."

"You need not fear that I would give you any, for I do not thus encourage vice and vagabondism."

"Now be off, and if you come here again, I shall give my servant orders to throw you down-stairs."

"That is an undertaking which your servant and yourself would fail in carrying out."

"If you doubt me, try it," and the arms were folded upon the broad breast, while the look that was turned upon the face of the cadet caused him to cower before it.

"Will you go, or shall I send for an officer?"

"If you prefer it, send for an officer, and let the story be known among your intimates, how your father's twin brother was welcomed by the inmates of Markham Manor after a quarter of a century's absence."

"Begone, man!" hissed the cadet, and, with a light laugh, Austin Markham turned upon his heel and departed.

Hardly had the young cadet regained his equanimity when a second visitor was announced.

This one had sent up the card bearing the following:

"STEVE or

Chandos's Secret Service Shadow Men."

In response to a summons a man entered who had the appearance of a minister.

He was attired in deep black, wore a white cravat, a band of crape upon his hat, and black kid gloves.

He moved with great solemnity of manner, was clean-shaven, wore his hair, which was intensely black, hanging upon his shoulders, while he appeared to be a cross between a country parson and an undertaker.

"Mr. Steve, I believe," said the cadet, holding the card in his hand, and gazing at his visitor as he entered.

"Yes, sir, I am Sly Steve, the detective," was the answer, in sepulchral tones.

"Yes, and it was in your agency that my father placed the case of his having been cheated out of five thousand dollars at Carlos's Gold Cages some time ago."

"True, sir, and asked for a report to be made to you, as he and Major Hall would be away."

"True, and have you a report to make?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"I have made a discovery."

"Well, sir?"

"I know the swindler."

Egbert started in spite of himself, but asked in a manner of assumed indifference:

"Indeed! who is he?"

"Yourself!" was the startling reply of the sepulchral-looking visitor, and his words fell upon the ears of the cadet like the trumpet of doom.

CHAPTER XXI.

STRANGE DEEDS.

THERE was no denying the fact that Cadet Egbert Markham was a frightened individual at the startling words of the strange visitor.

He had played a "joke on the gov'nor," as he had called it, in winning the money from him; but it was a joke he cared not to have known under any circumstances, for Major Boyd Hall was incensed at the fact that he had been impersonated, and had said to Colonel Markham that he would put the cheat in prison if he found him.

And more, Egbert was well aware that his father would be enraged at his act, and so much so as to perhaps cast him off utterly.

So it was a startling thing to be told that he was known as the perpetrator of the "little joke."

With flashing eyes and angry tone he turned upon the man and said:

"How dare you make such an accusation against me, sir?"

"Keep cool, Cadet Markham, and don't lose your temper."

"But I do lose my temper, sir, at such an accusation as you make against me."

"Yes, the truth offends, when we hear it."

"And you dare to say that I did such a thing?"

"I know it," was the calm response.

"By Heaven! but I will make you prove your words."

"I shall do that to the entire satisfaction of both your father and Major Hall."

"Do you mean to attempt this?"

"Yes, unless I can make terms with you."

"Ah! you wish to sell the secret you think you possess?"

"Exactly."

"I will not pay you a cent to prevent it."

"Well, Major Boyd Hall will."

"What do you want, man?" asked the cadet in alarm.

"Money."

"Silence money?"

"Exactly."

"Mind you, I am wholly innocent of this charge, but, as it would injure me to a certain extent to be known, I would like to arrange with you for silence."

"It can be done."

"For how much?"

"How much did you win from your father?"

"Five thousand, four hundred dollars."

"Ah! I thought you were innocent?" and a smile crossed the sepulchral face, at the clever manner in which he had entrapped his victim.

"Curses on you! don't you understand that my father told me the sum?" cried Egbert, furious at being outwitted.

"Yes; well, call it the truth, and say the sum was five thousand four hundred."

"Well?"

"I want just that sum."

"What?"

"I wish just the sum you won."

"You won't get it."

"Then all shall know just what you did, and if the game was a fair one, when you knew your father was a most interested player."

"I will give half the amount."

"You know my price."

"Call it three thousand."

"I call it just what it is, no more, no less."

"I have not that much money with me."

"Get it."

"I cannot, for I am poor just now."

"I must have it."

"I will give you three thousand now, and the balance within ninety days."

"Say three thousand now, your note for fourteen hundred in ninety days, and that solitaire ring you wear, which, as a right judge of diamonds, I would say was worth a thousand dollars."

"I paid twelve hundred for it."

"Very well, I'll take it at a thousand, and your note for the balance."

"I must have the ring to wear, so will make the note for twenty-four hundred."

"No, sir."

"You must arrange it as I desire."

"No, you know my terms, and I have little time to lose, so talk fast."

"You force me to your terms," and the ring was drawn reluctantly from the finger, the money taken from a desk and counted out, and the note was written.

"Write as I dictate," said the man, as he glanced at the I. O. U. given him.

"Is that not good enough?" petulantly replied the cadet.

"For you, yes; but not for me."

"Take your pen now, and follow my words:"

"I, Egbert Markham, cadet at West Point Military Academy, do hereby pledge myself to pay to Sly Steve, Detective, within ninety days from date, August —, 18—, the sum of fourteen hundred dollars, in consideration of his keeping a certain secret he holds against me, the said payment to be 'hush money.'"

"EGBERT MARKHAM."

"This is an iron note."

"It is a safe one, for it secures me from losing the fourteen hundred dollars."

"Well, you have your money, your security and note, and what have I?"

"Your freedom from prison."

"Good-by," and the solemn-looking visitor departed, leaving the cadet in a very unenviable frame of mind, and for the next two days he was anything but a happy man, and vented his ill-humor upon Talbot, who bore it with professional meekness.

The second day after his visit from Sly Steve another person called, having on his card the same legend about "Secret Service Shadow Men," but with the name of

"SPRINGTRAP."

"It seems to me that that was the name of the man detailed to the detective chief to work up the case," said the cadet, and he asked Talbot to show him in.

The visitor would have passed well for a kinsman of Sly Steve as far as his dress and solemnity of countenance were concerned; but Egbert knew him as the man he had seen at the detective agency and said:

"Well, Mr. Springtrap, have you any news?"

This he asked with dread, fearing that Sly Steve might have betrayed him.

"No, Mr. Markham; and I have come, as your father and Major Hall desired, to report to you that I cannot find the slightest clew to the one who so cleverly swindled the colonel."

"This is strange indeed," said the cadet, with a sigh of relief.

"I have done my duty thoroughly, but he baffles detection."

"Perhaps some of your other men might have been more successful?"

And Egbert put the question at a venture.

"No, sir; for I have alone been at work on it."

"Sir?"

"True, Mr. Markham, for I thought it best to work the case up alone."

"And you have had no assistance?"

"No, sir."

"And no one has known of the affair?"

"Not a soul, sir."

"Do you mean it?"

"Unless your father, the major or yourself have told others."

"We have not, I am sure, for we pledged ourselves to secrecy," said the amazed cadet.

"Well, sir, I have not told even my chief of the duty, after he assigned me to the case."

Egbert Markham was in a quandary and he felt very uncomfortable.

Then he said:

"Is there a man on your force by the name of Sly Steve?"

"No, sir."

"Indeed! I thought there was."

"No, sir."

Just then Talbot entered with his master's mail which he had been after, and Egbert said quickly:

"Here is a letter from my father, now."

"I will see what he says."

And he opened the letter, out of which dropped a bank-check, to his great delight, for the mysterious Sly Steve had left him as nearly dead-broke as he had been before his clever joke on his father at cards, a state of poverty that it was not comfortable for a fashionable young gentleman of his tastes to be in.

"Ah! now I will know what father says."

And as he glanced over the letter his eyes opened wide with amazement, while Mr. Springtrap saw that he had received some startling intelligence.

But the detective calmly awaited any revelation that might be made to him.

Soon it came, for the cadet said in a puzzled way:

"Mr. Springtrap, my father gives me a very surprising piece of information."

"Well, sir?"

"He says that he has just received a package, containing the entire amount of money won from him, by this impersonator of Major Hall, and a note, stating that it was a joke."

"A joke?" said the amazed detective.

"Yes, sir, so the one writes my father, that it was a joke, impersonating Major Hall and winning the money."

"This is strange indeed; but it was simply the act of some one who imposed upon your father, with no desire to keep his money."

"So it seems, sir, and my father sends a bank

draft here to me to pay for your services, and I would like to ask you for your statement."

"It is a small matter, Mr. Markham, for I have not discovered anything, and my expenses have been slight."

"Call it fifty dollars."

This sum Egbert Markham paid the detective from his own purse, and, seeing him out of the door, he shook the draft exultantly and cried:

"And here is one thousand for my services."

"But, hold! what does this mean, the sending home to my father the money I won from him?"

"That fool calling himself Sly Steve, has done this."

"But why has he done so?"

"What has he for, or against me, to do such an act?"

"And who is he?"

"I think I shall have to engage Springtrap to hunt up Sly Steve, for, with my ring, that note, and his having paid my father the money he lost, he is a dangerous man, and has me at a disadvantage."

"I will go after Springtrap and set him to work on Sly Steve, after which I will get this draft cashed and arrange some plan to get rid of Flora, for I am really getting afraid of that little woman."

"Now Sharp served me well, for he brought me back the lost record, and did his work thoroughly, so I will set him on this Sly Steve instead of Springtrap, for I do not care to get too many Secret Service Men mixed up in my affairs."

So saying the cadet sauntered out for a walk, sought Detective Sharp and set him on the track of the mysterious Sly Steve, and then dropped into the bank and cashed his draft.

From there he went to an office, on the door of which was a sign reading:

"CATCHAM & CHEATHAM,

"Attorneys-at-Law."

"All kinds of cases promptly attended to."

The cadet remained in this office for an hour or more, and yet, with perfect patience a man waited outside, a man who had followed him from his rooms.

Upon coming out Egbert Markham did not notice the stranger, or observe that he followed in his footsteps, with the air of one who had ample time upon his hands.

Ascending a pair of brown-stone steps, the young cadet rung a bell, and a moment after was ushered into a pleasant apartment, well furnished, and whose occupant was Flora, the beautiful young wife he seemed so anxious to get rid of.

Seeing him go into this house, the man who was on his track, said something to the driver, and then entered.

But the vehicle did not drive off, but went across the street, before the door of a public building, and there halted against the curb, while the occupant calmly settled back on the seat and kept his eyes upon the door opposite, through which the cadet had disappeared.

When he entered the rooms Flora, who was seated at the piano, idly running her fingers over the keys, ran toward him with a warm welcome, saying in her full, rich voice:

"It was kind of you, Egbert, to come to me, for I am so awful lonesome."

"I came, Flora, to have a talk with you, about what is best to be done," and leading her to a sofa he drew her down by his side and continued:

"The fact is, my father is suspicious of me, after the commandant of the Point has set him to thinking about your disappearance from home."

"Now I am aware that a detective is to be put upon my track, and should my father find out that you are my wife, I would be discarded at once, so I am anxious to prevent it, as you may know."

"When I graduate, and get my commission as a lieutenant, father will give me a handsome little fortune in my own name, and then I will be able to make our marriage known, don't you see, for, if he cuts me off, I will have all we need."

"Now I wish you to go away from the city at present, and you must promise me, that under no circumstances, will you hold communication with me until you hear from me, for my mail will be closely scrutinized."

"I will promise anything for your good, Egbert."

"And keep your promises, child?"

"With all honor."

"I believe you, Flo'; but now to my plan."

"You will have your rooms here, with the servant in them, until the end of the month; but you will take your own baggage and start for a village in the East, where you will be most comfortable."

"Get board at a hotel there, and you shall have books, and all you need to pass away time pleasantly, and I will write you regularly, and find some way in which you can communicate with me, while I will supply you most liberally with money, and here are five hundred dollars to begin with."

"You are so good to me, Egbert," said the girl, with tears in her eyes, and she pledged herself to keep all promises made by her, little dreaming then of what the future had in store for her.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN HEIRESS AND A TRAMP.

ABOUT the same time that Flora, the deceived young wife of Egbert Markham, started for the East, a man started out of a village not far from Markham Manor, and wended his way along a country road that bordered the Hudson River.

Now and then he would pause and gaze about him, in evident admiration of the beauty of the scenery, and then plod on his way once more.

His appearance was against him, to the ordinary observer, for he most certainly could be classed as one of that strange fraternity of nomads, known as tramps.

His clothes were ragged, his shoes worn, his appearance unkempt, and he carried at his back a small travel-stained pack, and in his hand a staff.

Yet why describe him, for the reader has met him before, and known him as the twin brother of Colonel Alfred Markham, as Austin Markham, the Vagabond Tramp.

Upon his right, as he plodded along, were here and there a country seat, then woodland, then cultivated fields, and thus the scenery was broken, with the river upon his left, the Palisades upon the other shore, and the distant city miles away, overhung by a cloud of misty smoke.

At length he came to a massive gateway, leading into a score of acres of woodland, with a villa a quarter of a mile beyond.

As he reached the gate a lady on horseback dashed up, and instantly he threw it open for her.

She saw the gray head and beard, the stooping shoulders, ragged clothing and travel-stained face, and said politely:

"I thank you, sir, will you accept this from me?"

Her hand went into the saddle pocket and a silk purse was drawn forth, while a half-dollar was extended in the gloved fingers to the man.

"Lady, I thank you; but my simple service was not rendered for money; but I would ask if yonder villa is the home of Judge Garlo?"

He gazed into her face as he spoke, and saw that it was exquisitely lovely, very haughty, and yet full of nobility of soul.

She was perhaps twenty, with golden hair, large blue eyes that had a look of sadness in them in repose, but were very bright when animated.

Her habit was dark-blue, trimmed with gold lace and brass buttons, that gave her a military air, which was added to by the gauntlet gloves, and sable slouch hat and plume.

"Yes, sir; that is the home of Judge Garlo; but he is not at home if you desire to see him," she said, with the same politeness as she had before shown.

"I cared not to see Judge Garlo, but his ward, Miss Marengo."

"Indeed! and why would you see her?"

"She is a beauty and an heiress; I am but a tramp; so I do not wonder you are surprised that I would speak with her."

There was a tinge of bitterness in the tone as well as the words, and the one addressed was a reader of human nature, and she saw that the man was at least a gentleman in rags, so she said pleasantly:

"A cat may look at a king, sir, and I assure you I see no reason why you should not speak with me, for I am Miss Marengo."

"I half-thought it, and I am glad to see you here where curious eyes are not upon us, lady."

"And what have you to say to me, sir?" she asked, with evident surprise.

"You are the daughter of General Durgar Marengo, who died some two years ago, in command of a Western Post?"

"I am, and I was there with my father; did we meet there, for I fail to recall you, sir?"

"No, we never met; but I knew your father well, and it was to serve his daughter that I came here."

"Indeed, sir; but pardon me if I say that I am better able to serve my father's old friend, if I may judge by appearances, for life seems to have gone hard with you."

"Life has, lady, in many ways, but I am not a beggar, nor do I need money."

"I am here, as I said, to serve you, for I learned that you were to marry, and I wished to see you before you pledged yourself to one who would only bring wretchedness to you."

Mary Marengo arched her brows in amazement, and said:

"May I ask how you obtained such information regarding me?"

"It matters not how, Miss Marengo, but I heard that an arrangement had been entered into between Judge Garlo and Colonel Markham, to have you become the wife of Cadet Egbert Markham."

"And Cadet Markham and myself are not to be taken into consideration?"

And her face flushed with anger.

"Oh, yes; Cadet Markham forms the third party in the arrangement, and it was supposed that you would readily consent, and if not could be coerced into accepting the situation."

"My dear sir, it has been hinted to me by my esteemed guardian that he had selected a husband for me, and his wife has sung the praises of the gentleman, whom I only learned yesterday to be Cadet Markham."

"But that toy soldier has not yet honored me with an offer of his hand and heart, nor asked for my fortune in return, and I cannot refuse what I have not had an opportunity to decline."

"But why your interest in the matter, may I ask?"

"May I request that you keep all knowledge of me secret?"

"Certainly."

"I desire to thwart Cadet Markham in what I know to be an act of villainy, when he asks you to become his wife."

"Ah! you do not seem to speak very highly of my honored suitor."

"I know him."

"You deem him tricky?"

"I know him to be a scamp."

"A frank confession, at least, and about one whom I must certainly have admired, and hoped some day to see win a name as a soldier; but your words set me to thinking."

"With one of your nature to think, is to look before leaping, and I am glad that I have warned one who is not to be easily deceived."

"In confidence therefore, in case you should learn to love Egbert Markham, before you pledge him your hand communicate with me, for here is an address that will reach me," and he handed her a card.

Glancing at it, she read aloud:

"CAPTAIN NERO.

"Secret Service Bureau,

"No. — Broadway,

"New York City."

Again the pretty brows were arched, and she said:

"Ah, I see, you are a detective?"

"I am a vagabond tramp, lady, nothing more; but a letter so addressed will reach me, and if necessary I can explain why I would not see you marry Cadet Markham."

"I feel that you are sincere in this, that you are other than you seem."

"I am rich, very rich, for my father left me an heiress, and I wish you would let me compensate you in some way, sir."

"No, Miss Marengo, I do not need compensation just now; but I have a favor to ask."

"Well, sir?"

"You visit at Markham Manor?"

"I was just on my way there to join Miss Markham in a ride."

"Colonel Markham has a ward?"

"Yes."

"A young girl by the name of Alice Victor?"

"Yes, and a most lovely child, but one who has been ill of late."

"Is she able to be out yet?"

"Oh yes."

"Will you ask her to come to the little arbor on the bluff, just opposite the entrance to the manor, and overhanging the river?"

"This is a strange request, sir."

"Do you doubt me, Miss Marengo?"

"I do not, but—"

"I assure you that it is important for me to see little Miss Victor alone, and that none of the Markham family know of her coming there to meet me."

The heiress pondered a moment in thought, and then she said with great deliberation:

"I meant to ask Miss Markham to ride with me; but I will ask Alice instead, and she will come here."

"See, yonder is an arbor in the Park, so go there and await her coming, for I will remain here, near her."

"You doubt me?"

"I do not, and yet I will take no chances as to what you wish with Alice, where I can do as I please as regards myself."

"You are a brave, noble girl, Miss Marengo, and I thank you."

"I will await in yonder retreat," and lifting his ragged hat, Austin Markham stood one side, while Mary Marengo rode on her way, lost in deep thought at what had occurred, and wholly unable to understand the strange man, a vagabond gentleman, who had warned her against Egbert Markham, and now wished to hold converse with Alice Victor, the pretty little ward of Colonel Markham.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VAGABOND FRIEND.

SEATED upon a rustic bench between two massive trees, and which was so sheltered that he was not visible by any curious eye from the villa, or the highway, Captain Nero quietly awaited the coming of Mary Marengo and the little Alice.

Nearly an hour passed, and then he heard the clatter of hoofs, and soon Mary Marengo appeared in sight, and was not alone.

Alice Victor accompanied her, looking very beautiful in her riding-habit and plumed hat, and with her face flushed from rapid riding.

"I asked you to come, Alice, instead of Edith, as I wish to tell you that there is some one who desires to see you," said Mary Marengo, as they rode out of the Markham Manor grounds.

"To see me?" added the young girl with surprise.

"Yes, and he is a tramp."

"Ah! where is he, and can it be—"

She paused quickly, her face flushed crimson, and then she added:

"I wonder if it can be my tramp?"

"Your tramp, Alice?" asked the surprised Miss Marengo.

"Yes; but can I tell you a secret, Miss Mary?"

"Yes."

"You know I have been sick?"

"Yes."

"You do not know the cause?"

"No."

"Well, I will tell you, but I hope you will not tell on me?"

"I will not, Alice."

"Some time ago, when Egbert, Edith, Mercer and myself were seated on the piazza, an old tramp came up and asked to see Colonel Markham."

"Egbert set his dog, Nero, upon him, and I tried to drag him back, by holding to his collar, but could not, and the old man dealt a blow at him that glanced and hit me."

"I was stunned, and it cut my scalp to the bone; but the—the—tramp killed Nero, and—"

"And what else, Alice?" asked Mary, as she saw that the young girl was carefully picking her words.

"And the tramp went away, after he had picked me up and told Egbert to keep back or he would kill him."

"The doctor came and dressed my wound, and I was right sick after it; but Nero bit the—the—tramp, and the doctor said he met him on his way home from his visit to me, forced him to cauterize and dress his wounds, and then paid him liberally for it."

"What kind of a man was the one you call your tramp, Alice?"

"Tall, old-looking, with gray hair and beard, and very sad-faced and ragged."

"That is the one that wishes to see you; but, why all this secrecy about his coming, and the blow he gave you?"

"Colonel Markham wished it so, and was very angry that he had come; but Mamma Markham scolded Egbert, and also Edith, for insulting the—the—tramp."

"Did Colonel Markham know the man?"

"I think he must have," was the evasive reply.

"Well, you will find your tramp in yonder retreat in the Park, and I will gather wild flowers along the wall here; but if you wish me, call to me."

"I will, Miss Mary; but if it is the one I mean I do not fear him," and Alice rode on to the clump of timber in which was seated Austin Markham.

He arose at her approach, lifted his battered hat in a courtly way, and said with deep feeling:

"I am happy to see you well again, my dear child, for my anxiety about you has been very great."

"Oh, sir; I am all right again, so do not worry."

And she held out her hand as she drew rein by his side.

"I will not now, my child; but I have come to ask you to forgive the blow I so unintentionally dealt you?"

"I have nothing to forgive, and you would have been guiltless of wrong even had it killed me, for it was meant for that vicious Nero; but he bit you, I know, as the doctor said so."

Austin Markham smiled as he asked:

"The doctor then told that he met me?"

"Yes, sir; but are you well yet?"

"Oh, yes; for it little troubled me, my child; but may I ask you a few questions without angering you?"

"As many as you wish, sir."

"You know who I am?"

"Yes, sir; the twin-brother of Colonel Markham, though the colonel and his children say you are an impostor."

"And Mrs. Markham?"

"Says that you are the colonel's brother, sir."

"And you?"

"Well, sir?"

"What say you?"

"Your looks alone should convince any one that you are no impostor; for—for—but forgive me if I say were you dressed up you would be the image of the colonel, only your hair and beard are much whiter."

"Yes; his life has been an easy one, mine a sad and hard one, and gray hairs are as often the finger-marks of sorrow as of age."

"But do you live at Markham Manor altogether?"

"Yes, sir; it is the only home I have."

"Is it pleasant for you there?"

"Mamma Markham is kind to me, and Papa Markham is not unkind; but Egbert and Edith, and sometimes Mercer, make me feel that I am poor now."

"And you are poor, then?"

"Yes, sir; but all thought my father had left me a large fortune."

"And he appointed Colonel Markham your guardian?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who else?"

"No one, sir."

"Leaving all your property in the colonel's hands?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was your father's name, my child?"

"Randolph Victor, sir."

"And your mother?"

"I never saw her, sir, for she died when I was a very little baby."

"And your father reared you?"

"No, sir, he left me in care of a good old lady and came to see me as often as he could; but his business prevented his coming more than twice a year."

"Where did you live?"

"Those who had charge of me lived on their farm in Jersey, but I only spent my vacations there, as I was sent to boarding-school in Philadelphia."

"And where were you when your father died?"

"At school, sir, in Philadelphia."

"And then?"

"Colonel Markham came after me and took me home with him."

"Do you remember where it was you were in Jersey?"

"Near Morristown, sir."

"And the names of your friends there?"

"William Drake and his wife."

"Had they children?"

"Yes, sir, Dudley Drake, a boy three years older than I am, and oh, he was so desperately in love with me."

The man smiled at the innocent confession, and asked:

"Do you hear from them often?"

"No, sir, for Papa Markham said I was not to write to them, and they do not know where I am."

"And so you lost your fortune?"

"Yes, sir."

"You do not know how?"

"Father's debts when paid by Colonel Markham, left only a little for me; but I don't mind it, for I do not need money."

"Poor child, you little know its worth; but will you keep secret the fact that you have seen me?"

"Indeed I will, sir, for Papa Markham would be furious to know it."

"And if you ever need a friend will you let me know?"

"I do not know where to find you, sir."

"Have you a good memory?"

"Yes, sir."

"Write to Captain Nero, Number — Broadway, New York; can you remember that?"

"Indeed I can, sir, for it was the name of Egbert's vicious dog that you killed, and I never heard a man called by it, excepting that cruel old Nero of olden times, and you are not at all like him, I know."

"I hope not, though I get cruel humors on me sometimes; but don't forget the address in New York."

"I will not, for I am going there to boarding-school soon, at Madam Holbrook's."

"Oh, then you will soon leave here?"

"Yes, sir, and I am glad, for only Mamma Markham treats me with real kindness."

"It is better so; good-by, my child, and thank Miss Marengo for me, for her kindness in bringing you here," and grasping the little gloved hand the man walked away, while Alice rode slowly back to join Mary Marengo, after her long talk with her vagabond friend.

CHAPTER XXIV. GUILTY.

FLORA MARKHAM—for she certainly had the right to her husband's name, though married in secret—was as innocent as a child, and her nature was most confiding.

Her lot had been a pleasant one in early girlhood, for her mother and father loved her devotedly, and she had grown up like a wild flower, dwelling upon her father's farm upon the Hudson, and which was not very far distant from West Point.

She had admired the military from a child, stood somewhat in awe of the cadets, and yet was glad to watch them at parade and drill, when she went near the Academy, which she often did, mounted upon her little pony, on which she rode to the village school and back every day.

Her mother, a woman of refinement and education, had taught her well, while her father, an easy-going farmer, loved his boat, dogs and gun, and was wont to often carry her with him on his hunting trips.

Thus it was that Flora became an expert oars-

woman, a good shot, with gun, rifle or pistol, could sail a boat as well as any man, rode like an Indian, and drove like a Rocky Mountain stage-driver.

But within doors her mother had tempered her nature by teaching her music, drawing, and placing her under a refining influence.

Beautiful in face and form, she became the admiration of all who knew her, and deep was the sympathy extended to her when her mother died, while still deeper did people sympathize when her father married a second time, taking to his home a perfect virago who held him wholly under her influence.

Thus it was that the good people, and the bad, shook their heads ominously, when they learned that Flora had left her home.

Some one had either seen her with Cadet Egbert Markham, after her disappearance, or surmised it, and so the gossips set the wheel of scandal going.

Nabob, the youth who had driven Flora away by night, was seized upon and questioned by all; but he looked innocently, knew nothing, and was a hard nut to crack for information.

But his life became a torture in the village, for he was accosted upon all sides with questions, until, when he saw any one approaching him, he was wont to shout out:

"I don't know nothing, so don't ask me."

This was his usual response, and he headed off many by answering before asked.

Up at the Academy Nabob was often wont to go, and here too he was questioned, for the cadets had their opinion on the matter, knowing well that their comrade, Egbert Markham, was not noted for being a model of goodness, while his money allowed him to do pretty much as he pleased.

So Nabob decided that he would follow the example of the birds, go southward as the fall approached, and one night he set off on foot for the great City of New York.

"I hain't goin' ter starve, I'm reckoning, and I'll try city life awhile, and get a chance to see Miss Flora too, now and then," he said, as he trudged along on his lonely way.

But the day upon which Nabob arrived in the metropolis, was that upon which Flora had left it, going to the little village in the East, where Egbert Markham had bade her go.

In those days trains did not whirl along with the rapidity of to-day, and it was no small journey for a young girl to go a few hundred miles.

Egbert had seen her off, bade her an affectionate farewell, and then left her to go on alone.

With a heart full of sorrow at parting with the one she so dearly loved, Flora sat in her seat, gazing out into the darkness as the train rolled along.

Then came the conductor's flashing lantern, and she took from her sachel her purse, handed over a ticket and sunk back again.

"This is not a ticket on this road, miss," said the conductor.

"Indeed, sir, it was bought for me by my husband—"

"Where are you going, may I ask?" and the conductor gazed into the flushed face.

"My ticket was to Boston, and from there I was to buy one to my destination."

"This ticket is to Buffalo, and you will have to pay me your fare."

"How could Egbert have made such a mistake?" muttered Flora, as she handed the conductor the money for her fare, blushing at the attention drawn to her.

The next morning she bought a ticket to her destination, hastily ate her breakfast and entered the stage-coach, anxious to escape the close scrutiny of a man who was watching her.

Arriving at the village she sought a hotel, secured a pleasant room, and sat down by the window, feeling very blue, at being all alone in a strange place, without a soul to speak to.

She was sorely tempted in her loneliness to take the first train back to New York.

"Ah, why did he send me here?"

"Surely I could have kept out of his father's way, and yet remained in New York."

"And there is that horrid man I saw watching me in Boston."

"I shall keep my room and go back to New York to-morrow."

"I declare I am utterly wretched, and if I must be kept out of the way I will stay on some farm near New York."

"Ah! who is that?"

And she started as a knock came upon the door.

In answer to her summons the man she had seen on the cars entered and the landlord accompanied him.

"Miss Florence, this gentleman desires to have a little talk with you, and I hope for your sake you can satisfy him that all is right," said the landlord, who was a good-faced man of fifty.

Flora turned deadly pale and rose, while she said:

"I do not know, sir, what that person can wish with me."

"You shall soon know, miss, and if I am wrong I will be the first to apologize."

And the man came forward.

He had a blunt way and honest face, and looked with certain pity upon the young girl, who asked:

"Well, sir, what is it you desire?"

"Is your name Miss Florence?" came the blunt query.

Flora blushed and then turned pale; but she said:

"Had you asked the landlord, sir, he could have told you that."

"You are registered on the book as Miss Ora Florence, New York, and I ask you is that your correct name?"

"May I ask why my name concerns you, sir?"

"I am an officer of the law, young lady, and I have a right to know."

Again Flora's face whitened, for she had a holy horror of officers of the law and she knew not what to say.

"I wish an answer, miss."

"No, sir; it is not my correct name," she faltered.

"What is?"

"I decline to tell you."

"I must know."

"You shall never know it from me, sir," she said, firmly.

"Then, miss, it becomes my duty to arrest you."

"Arrest me?" gasped Flora.

"Yes, miss."

"And for what?"

"Theft!"

"Theft! Great God! is this some cruel joke?"

"I fear you will find it a sad reality, miss."

"Permit me to see your sachel?"

She sprung toward her trunk in which she had placed it, quickly turned the key and put it in her pocket.

"Ah, miss, you only condemn yourself by your acts, for the law opens all locks."

"Give me that key, please."

"I will not."

"Miss, don't make it worse for yourself than it is, for I tell you there is a serious charge against you, and I have followed you from Boston."

"If you are innocent, you can prove it by letting me see your sachel."

"What do you wish to see?"

"I told you that a theft had been committed, and suspicion fell upon you."

"If you have the stolen property, then you are the one I want; but if not, I must beg your pardon and look elsewhere for the culprit."

"What was stolen?"

"A lady's sachel."

Flora walked to her trunk, unlocked it and said haughtily:

"As I am an utter stranger, I suppose I must bear the insult of suspicion."

"Now what do you wish to search for?"

"That sachel, please."

"It is mine."

"It answers the description of the one stolen."

"See! here is a ticket for Buffalo that was in the one stolen, a silk purse, a roll of bills, a velvet box with some diamond earrings, and—She has fainted," and the constable sprung forward to catch her and prevent her fall.

"Who would have believed her to be a thief?" said the landlord.

"Ah! you know not what people are, landlord; but I confess she staggers me, for she is so young and beautiful."

"But I will have to take her to jail, and the lady to whom the sachel belongs can come here," and when Flora fully regained consciousness, she found herself in a cell of the village jail, which was but a few doors from the tavern.

There she heard the full charge against her, that she had picked up a lady's sachel in the waiting-room and who had been sitting next to her, and hurried off with it, accompanied by a young man.

Missing her sachel soon after, the lady had reported it, and describing the girl who sat near her, it was found that she had taken the Boston train.

An officer had followed in the next, arriving in Boston as she was about to depart for the village.

He had taken the next stage-coach and followed her, and then decided to arrest her as the guilty one.

She had registered under a name that she admitted was not her own, and the sachel was certainly the stolen one, according to the accurate description given by the lady of her property, and who lived in the State in which poor Flora was then a prisoner.

"Send for your friends to get you out of this scrape, miss, for I think there must be some mistake," said the kind-hearted jailer's wife.

"I have no one I can send to," was the low response.

"Surely you did not take the sachel intentionally, for you don't look guilty?"

"I took it, but thought it was mine, for it is exactly like mine, and the lady will see when she compares them, for she must have the other," said Flora, and that night, with an almost breaking heart she went to bed in a cell.

But the lady arrived the next day, a large,

hard-faced woman, without one atom of mercy for the poor girl, and she claimed her property, having described exactly every article in it.

And the sachel belonging to Flora she knew nothing about, and in fact did not believe she had any.

Thus was Flora's theft made seemingly manifest, and she was almost immediately brought to trial.

The conductor was summoned, and he had told how she had said her husband had bought her ticket for her, and she had offered one to Buffalo instead of Boston.

Then he told how she had paid her fare from a silk purse in the sachel; then among her effects in her trunk the constable had found quite a large sum of money, some valuable jewelry, rich dresses, and not a scrap of paper, with two other saches that evidently had belonged to others than the girl.

Her registering too under a name she said was assumed was against her, and altogether it was a clear case of guilt.

The kind-hearted jailer's wife had mailed two letters for Flora, recently, one to "Nabob," at West Point, and the other to Egbert Markham, under an assumed name and to an address he had given her; but no replies were received, the day of her trial came, not a word would she utter as to who she was, where she was from, or who were her friends, and thus was she found "guilty," by an intelligent jury and sentenced by a learned judge to five years in the State's Prison.

CHAPTER XXV.

NABOB ABROAD.

"HELLO, Cadet Markham. ef thet hain't you, you kin kick me!"

Such was the salutation that Cadet Egbert Markham received one day in the streets of New York, and it came from the lips of a boy.

A boy, and yet one who had a shrewd, old face, full of fun, of cunning and recklessness.

"Why, Nabob! you here in this great city?" said the cadet, pausing and glancing about him to see if any one he knew was near to see him compromise his dignity by holding converse with a little country lad.

"I'm right here, sir, and big as it is, I've met the very one I wanted to see."

"Well, my boy, here is a dollar for you to see the sights with."

"I didn't come here to beg, Cadet Markham, for I make a honest living without begging; but somehow I concluded to start out for myself, and I wanted to find Miss Flora."

"Why, is she not at the Point?"

"Now look here, cadet, do you take me for a fool?"

"I take you for a very impudent boy, sir, and so will leave you."

And Egbert was hastening on when Nabob called out:

"All right, I'll go and ask the colonel where Miss Flora is."

"Say, boy, what do you mean?" angrily said the cadet, turning back again.

"I mean to find Miss Flora."

"I know nothing about her."

"You forget I brought her here to join you."

"She was a fool to trust you, a boy."

"Perhaps not such a fool as she was to trust you, a cadet," came the quick response.

"Well, she has gone away, for she came here to get work of some kind, and she told me she was going traveling with a lady as a governess to her children."

Nabob made no reply; he simply closed one eye and with the other gazed up into the face of the young man.

"That means you do not believe me?"

"You is good at guessin' the meaning of a one-eyed look."

"I mean just what I say; I do not know where Flora is, for she left town some days ago, and as a governess in a Southern family."

"Honest?"

"Boy, do you doubt me?"

"Didn't you first tell me she was at the Point, then said you knew nothing about her, and now you takes another track, so how am I to know if you tell me the truth or not?"

"You are a great boy, Nabob, and I should have told you the truth at first; but when I hear from Miss Flora, for she will doubtless write me, I will let you know, for I will see you at the Point."

"I guess not, for I has cut the place."

"Left there?"

"I has for sure."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Make a start to git a fortin'."

"Where?"

"Right here."

"Well, luck to you, Nabob, and if you wish to find me at any time come to yonder house, the one with the high stoop, and ask for me."

"Here is a starter for your fortune, and do not ever tell any one that you brought Flora to the city to join me, as they might not understand it."

"No, folks mightn't, that's so," was the quiet response of the boy, as he took the twenty-dollar bill given him by the cadet, and bade him good-by, while he muttered to himself:

"This is medicine money, to heal my tongue of the blisters caused by lyin' for him and Miss Flora."

"But I wonder if he told the truth, for somehow I hain't got the confidence in him Miss Flora has."

"He don't fool me, for I know she came here to see him, and I only hope she has gone off with good folks as will take care of her."

"Now what is that man gazin' at me that way for?"

"I hain't no show to be looked at," and Nabob started to walk on when the man referred to, and who had been watching him, during his talk with the cadet, now came forward and said:

"Well, my little man, you are a stranger in town?"

"How does you know that?" asked Nabob, not understanding how he could be "spotted" so soon as a stranger.

"I see the hayseed in your hair, and you have about you the aroma of the country."

"I hain't such a fool as I look, if that's what you mean," said Nabob.

The man laughed, and the boy continued:

"See here, mister, your face is too sad-lookin' to break it up with a laugh, for hit hain't becomin'."

"Guess you is a grave-digger with your Sunday clothes on."

Again the man laughed, and said good-naturedly:

"Appearances are as deceitful, in my case, as in yours."

"No, I am not a grave-digger any more than are you a fool; but I thought I would like to make your acquaintance, as I saw you talking to my friend, Cadet Markham."

"Does you know him?"

"Did I not just say so?"

"I never seen you before."

"That may be, but it is because you have not been long abroad."

"Where's that?"

"Away from home."

"This town is as much home to me as anywhere else."

"Indeed! then you are a wanderer?"

"I wander a little, have wandered some, and guess I'll wander now—good-by, mister."

"My lad, let me ask you a question?"

"All right."

"Where are you just from?"

"The Point."

"West Point?"

"Yes."

"You were not one of the cadets at the Academy?"

"No, I was one of the professors."

"Indeed! I am glad to meet you, professor—what is your name, may I ask?"

"Nabob."

"A good name; well, Professor Nabob, was it at the Point that you met Cadet Markham?"

"It was."

"Do you know him well?"

"Rather."

"You seemed to anger him in some things you said to him."

"You was a-snoopin' round, and seen thet, did yer?"

"Yes, I'm in the snoopin' business, for I am a detective."

"A constable?"

"Well, something of that kind."

"Well, you hain't got no business with me, fer I is honest, hain't stole nothin', an' jist come to town to make a fortin'."

"Suppose I start you on the right road to do so."

"To go to jail?"

"No, to make a fortune?"

"What to do?"

"Turn detective."

"Now, I'd make a pretty constable, wouldn't I?"

"My boy, I am in earnest in my offer," and the man suddenly changed his flippant manner of speaking, and continued:

"I am, as I said, an officer of the law, and I can give you something to do right off, with good pay, if you are willing to undertake it."

"You look as tho' you meant it."

"I do."

"What am I to do?"

"Come with me to the office, and I will tell you."

"I'll go, for just now I have plenty of spare time," and Nabob went with the man, who was none other than the serious-faced individual who had so cleverly discovered in Egbert Markham the one who had impersonated Major Hall, and won so large a sum from his father.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GAME OF CARDS.

EGBERT MARKHAM was getting into a corner, financially, when the draft from his father came to help him out a little.

The fact is, the receipt of his money, won at the gambling-table, by one who had impersonated Major Hall, put the colonel in a good-humor.

He did not care so much for the return of the money, for that was of little consequence to one

of his wealth; but he was glad to know just how he had been made the victim of a joke, and he sent a draft to Egbert to pay liberally all Secret Service expenses, adding that he gave the sum regained to his son for the part he had taken to help him regain it.

The small bill for Secret Service work was quickly paid by Egbert, who then settled a few pressing debts, and determined to invest the balance in winning a larger sum.

To do this he went to "Carlos's Gold Cage" and began to play.

He won at one game, and becoming reckless, sought an opponent to play for large sums.

He had not long to look for one, as a young man, in an undress naval uniform was more than willing to accommodate him, having just come into the room, and, as he remarked, gotten back from sea with some prize money and a year's pay.

The stranger introduced himself as Gordon Lilly, a lieutenant in the navy, and was glad to find that his opponent was an army officer in embryo.

So they took seats, with a vase of cigars at hand, a decanter of brandy, and the promise of an interesting game before them.

At first Cadet Egbert won several games; but though the stakes were large, the sailor seemed not to care, and laughed lightly at his losses.

Then the young naval officer began to win, his losses were made up, and steadily he won from the cadet sum after sum.

Egbert grew pale, as he felt he had lost his former winnings, and nearly all of the money he had brought with him, and he played slowly and with the greatest caution.

Then suddenly the tables turned once more, the fickle Goddess of Fortune came back and perched upon his shoulder, and he began to steadily make up his losses.

The young sailor, however, showed no sign of uneasiness or annoyance, and at last the cadet was largely the winner, and said:

"With the next bet, sir, I will stop playing, as I have an engagement."

"Then, Mr. Markham, I make the bet the entire amount of your winnings with five thousand dollars more added," was the cool reply.

Egbert started, for it seemed a reckless offer to make; but fortune was on his side and he answered:

"As you please, Mr. Lilly."

Then Cadet Markham seemed to grow nervous under the penetrating eyes of his adversary at cards, for they watched his every look, every movement, and seemed fairly to read the cards through the backs, for he played steadily to win.

"You have won," gasped Egbert, realizing that he had swamped himself financially.

"Yes; but we will play again."

"I have but a few hundreds left, and our games have been for thousands," said the cadet.

"Well, Mr. Markham, as I know just who you are, and something of your prospects, I will take your I. O. U. on certain conditions, if you wish to redeem yourself."

"I certainly do; but what are the conditions of the I. O. U.'s?" sullenly said the cadet.

"I am aware that you are soon to marry an heiress, and I will accept your due-bill for any sum, contingent upon your marriage to Miss Marengo."

Egbert started, for how was he known to his sailor companion?

He knew that it was rumored that he was engaged to the heiress, Mary Marengo, but how had this sailor, fresh from a long cruise, heard it?

Still he was in a bad fix, financially, as to appeal to his father for money he knew would be useless, and if he returned to West Point with certain debts unpaid he was well aware they would beset after him to the commandant.

If he could therefore raise money on the contingency of his marrying Mary Marengo, he did not hesitate to do so.

He was certain of marrying her, he held the record of his marriage to Flora in his own possession, and he believed that she would trouble him no more, and so he said:

"I do not know how it is, Mr. Lilly, that you are aware of my engagement to Miss Marengo; but I will not deny the fact, and, as upon my marriage with her my father gives me the share of what would be my inheritance of his estate, I will give you an I. O. U."

"Very well, suppose we call it for the amount I have just won from you, in all—say nine thousand dollars?"

"That will do, sir."

"Then please sign this, and I will accept it as good against my money, in the next game," and the sailor hastily wrote as follows, having called to a boy to bring him pen, ink and paper, and to remain and take them away again:

"It is hereby agreed that I pay to Gordon Lilly the sum of Nine Thousand Dollars, with interest from date within one month after I shall have wedded Miss Mary Marengo, the heiress and ward of Judge Garlo, of New York, and to which young lady I am now engaged."

"There, sir," and the sailor gave the cadet the paper to read.

Egbert Markham's face flushed and paled by turns, and he seemed to be strangely nervous; but he wished the chance to win back his money and here it was, with the scratch of a pen.

"I hope this will remain a secret with us, sir?"

"Would I injure my prospects of getting the money, Mr. Markham, by speaking of it, when I well know how quickly a woman would resent such a transaction?" was the reply.

"True; I will sign it."

And taking the pen he did so.

"Here, boy, sign this as a witness, for it is a mere form, and you need not know the nature of the matter."

And the sailor handed the pen to the waiter, who placed his name as witness, though the cadet half-objected, but was overruled by his companion in gaming.

"Now, Mr. Markham, I place my money against this paper on our next game," he said, quietly.

"And I have won," he said, half an hour after.

Egbert Markham was very pale, for he knew that he had but gone deeper into the mire, and he did not know what to say or do.

But the sailor said pleasantly:

"Better luck next time for you, Mr. Markham."

"You will have to take my word for payment if we play more, sir."

"I will stake my money and this paper against your word, Cadet Markham."

"How can you?"

"I will risk my money and the paper you gave against your answering me a question."

"If I win, you answer a question I shall ask you, and if you win I shall not ask it, and you get my money and this paper."

"What can you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Is there any question I can answer thus valuable to you?"

"I think so."

"Will you ask it now?"

"After I have won or lost."

"I agree," was the eager response.

"Remember, you are to answer truthfully and under oath?"

"As you please."

Then was another game of cards begun and played through to the end, the sailor watching the cadet so closely that he grew nervous and angry.

"I have won again, Mr. Markham, so I keep my money and this paper; but, had I not watched you so closely that you could not play that duplicate ace of hearts against me and which you had in your left hand, the game would have been yours."

"Sir! do you dare say that I would cheat by using duplicate cards?" cried the cadet, white with passion.

"Sh! My dear sir, don't raise your voice unless you wish to bring others into our private room and let them into a secret that I have discovered."

"Yes, I do say you have cards the counterpart of those used in this place, and you used them to-night on me until I discovered your little game and watched you too closely to have you continue it."

"Then I won, and I now demand that you pay your bet by answering my question."

"What is it?"

And Egbert Markham never before had felt the agony he then endured.

"You will swear to answer it truthfully?"

"Yes."

"So help you God?"

"Yes," was the low response, for he felt he was in the power of the man before him.

"Well, sir, the question is a simple one."

"Where is Flora Hobart?"

The question caused the cadet to start and become livid, while he stammered out:

"I know nothing about her."

"You are under oath, sir," was the stern reply.

"Who are you?"

"Gordon Lilly."

"I know not where the girl is."

"She came here to join you, Cadet Markham, and she passed some time in the city, and then departed, and it is to know where that I seek information from you."

"What is she to you?"

"A woman."

"Why would you know?"

The sailor was silent a moment, and then said: "She was driven from home by a step-mother's cruelty; but her father still loves her and would not see her come to want, or harm, so sought to find her out and aid her."

"It was believed that you knew something about her, for you were seen in the city with her, and so I come to you to find her."

"She did seek me, as her friend; but I could do nothing for her, and she went off as a governess to a family in the South."

"More I do not know."

"Very well, sir, I am glad she is well cared for, and will say good-night."

"One moment, sir."

"Well?"

"Who are you?"

"You will find me *your own shadow*, if you attempt any game of devilry against Flora Hobart," was the quick reply, and without another word the man left the room, while, with a groan of anguish, Cadet Markham sunk down in his chair, while he said in a husky voice:

"Great God! how can I ever extricate myself from the position I now am in?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"ROBBING PETER TO PAY PAUL."

CADET MARKHAM passed some sleepless hours, after his strange game of cards with the one who had won his money at the Carlo Gold Cage.

He had gone home, aroused Talbot to get him some supper, had left it untouched, and then drank several glasses of brandy, pacing the floor the while in deep thought.

Then he retired to bed, as it was near dawn, and tried to sleep.

But sleep would not lull him into forgetfulness of his position, and the sun was far above the horizon before weary nature claimed repose.

It was late in the afternoon when he awoke, and he was in a very ill-humor, as Talbot soon discovered.

"Talbot," he said, as he was eating his breakfast, which was being served at the dinner hour.

"Yes, sir."

"I shall have to return to West Point."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you to get in my little bills here, for household expenses and rent, and bring them to me to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I wish you to find a purchaser for my furniture and things."

"Are you not coming back here, sir?"

"No, for I shall graduate, then marry, and perhaps do the latter and not the former."

"Sell these things to the highest bidder, and for cash."

"Pay my bills with the money, take a month's pay ahead for yourself—ah! by the way, I will keep you in my pay, so you can come up to the Point and get quarters there, though no one must know you are in my service."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall make a kind of messenger of you; in fact you can be useful in many ways, and, as you understand my ways you can be of great service."

"Thank you, sir."

"I think you should have, over debts you have to pay for me, several hundred dollars, and you can keep that in hand, go to the village near the Point, put up at the tavern, and profess to be an artist, for I notice that you draw, though badly."

"Yes, sir."

"Get you some artist materials there, and amuse yourself there as you can, while I will pay your expenses, and allow you the same salary you are getting now."

"You are very kind, sir."

"I know it, Talbot, and I expect you to prove your appreciation of my allowing you to live a life of ease and idleness, and paying you for doing so."

"Yes, sir."

"The trunks and traps of mine I do not sell, carry with you as your own, and I will have them near me, if I should need them."

"Now go and tell the chief of the Secret Service Shadow men, to send Springtrap, the detective, to me at once."

"Yes, sir," and the acquiescent Talbot departed.

In half an hour he returned with the detective, who asked smilingly:

"More work for me, Mr. Markham?"

"Yes, Springtrap, I wish you to search this town over to find one Gordon Lilly, a lieutenant in the navy, and discover if there is such a person in the United States service."

"Bring me word to-morrow, for I must leave the city soon."

"Yes, sir, I can do so in that time."

"I suppose you wish his address only?"

"Yes, and when he came from sea, how long he has been here, and just what he is doing in the city, who his friends are, and all else that you can find out regarding him."

With these instructions Springtrap departed, and soon after Egbert Markham left his room and wended his way down-town to one of the fashionable jewelry establishments where he was quite well known.

"Ah, Mr. Golden, I am glad to meet you, for I have come in to make some purchases, if you are not particular about having the cash just now?" said Egbert to the jeweler.

"No, Mr. Markham, if you desire a little time, I will be glad to give it to you."

"I do, as I will tell you as a secret, I am to be married, and I have had very large sums to pay of late, in purchasing a city home, and furnishing it; but this is *entre nous*, of course."

"Of course, Mr. Markham; but what would you have, sir?"

"I desire a diamond necklace, something very elegant."

"Here is one I think you will like; but it is a

very costly necklace, the price being fifteen thousand dollars."

"It is indeed beautiful, and I am so pleased with it I need look no further, though it is more than I expected to give; but then it is an exquisite necklace."

"It is indeed, Mr. Markham, and is well worth the price, for there are sixty stones in the necklace and fifteen in the star, all of them pure and rare gems."

"I will give you thirty days on it, sir."

"I cannot touch it then, sir, for I would like fully three months."

"As you please, Mr. Markham, though I will have to charge you interest on the time, as I am selling it very close."

"Certainly, sir," and Egbert Markham walked out with the exquisite necklace safely put away in his pocket.

Straight to his rooms he went, and at once he began the work of changing his appearance, by the aid of a wig, a pair of blonde whiskers and a stout pea-jacket and slouch hat.

Then he once more went out, and made his way swiftly along toward a part of the town where his footsteps had seldom before carried him.

He halted at a shop over the door of which hung a sign reading:

"LOAN OFFICE."

He went in, asked to be shown a private room, and was ushered into an alcove, one of several that were on one side of the shop.

Then the proprietor appeared at an aperture in the wall, and asked his business.

"Here is a diamond necklace I wish to get twelve thousand dollars loan on for three months' time."

"It was very handsome, but I give you ten thousand dollars on it," was the response.

"I named my price, for I know its worth," was the stern reply.

"I give five hundred more."

"Give me the necklace back, for I know its value well."

"Vell, I makes it eleven thousand."

"Give me my necklace, Jew, for I am not one to trifle with."

"Vell, I gif you t'e monish, put if you don't comes pack for t'e necklace, I lose five hundred dollars on it."

The disguised cadet laughed rudely, and the Jew counted out the money in large bills, gave a ticket of redemption for the necklace, bearing usurious interest, and the young man hastily departed with the remark:

"This will square my debts, and for three months I will be easy."

Going to his rooms he hastily threw off his disguise, put his redemption ticket carefully away among his private papers, and wended his way to the "Gold Cage."

There he quickly settled his debts, which were for losses at cards, and had been extended from time to time, and when he returned to his rooms that night he seemed light-hearted, for he said:

"A couple of thousand more will square me with my tailor and others, and I shall have a few hundreds in hand left over to go back to the Point with."

"True, I have robbed Peter to pay Paul, but then I have three months to look ahead, and when I can engage to marry Marengo, the governor will be liberal, especially when I tell him I do not owe a dollar in the city or at the academy."

"That ring of mine and due bill to that fellow calling himself Sly Sleuth bother me, as does also the nine thousand dollar note to that sailor, if sailor he is; but then if father is liberal I can get rid of those, and once I marry Marengo I shall be a millionaire, for they do say her father left her millions."

And with his conscience at rest, as he considered it, Egbert Markham retired to rest, and dropped off to sleep, a sleep so deep that he did not see a dark form steal noiselessly into his room, did not waken as a shadow seemed to fall upon him, then glide away, and, after appearing in several parts of the room disappear again as it seemed to fade, rather than walk out of the door through which it had entered.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE YOUNG DETECTIVE.

AGAIN we find Captain Nero in his cabin on the old time-worn brig.

He had been absent for a few days, had seen, as the reader knows, Mary Marengo and Alice Victor, and apparently satisfied with his work accomplished, had returned to his headquarters in the brig.

Under his management Secret Service work was going on in a way that promised to yield good fruit in the end, and the stern old detective chief smiled grimly as he sat glancing over papers he had received from the faithful men under him, and who, from Chandos down, obeyed his slightest word as law, though to them he was a mystery wholly unfathomable.

"Fairfax should be here, for it is his time and he is very prompt," he said aloud.

"I have mapped out this course for him to pursue, and I believe it will result in discover

ing the truth," he continued, as he took up a paper and glanced over it.

"Ah! here he comes."

And as he spoke a man entered.

He would not have been recognized as the convict had not Captain Nero called him by name, for he was wholly different in make-up than when last seen, appearing now as an aged beggar who seemed to have met with only hard knocks and harder luck in the world.

"Well, Fairfax, back again?" said the chief.

"Yes, Captain Nero, and I have little to report," was the somewhat dejected reply.

"Your sentence, though innocent, your imprisonment, and the fact that you fear every man you see may penetrate your disguise and recognize you as an escaped convict, prevent you from doing the service you might for your self."

"I fear I am blue," said the convict.

"I know you are; but it should cheer you up to know that you are innocent and that some one else is guilty, and that you can find out just who it is that should take your place in prison."

"I fear it can never be done, captain."

"I feel that it can; but did you see the landlord of your rooms again?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"He gets his rent regularly and anonymously."

"Did you see the writing of the one who addressed it to him?"

"Yes, sir; but it is disguised, as you see, for I brought this wrapper in which the money was sent and which I got the landlord to give me."

"Ah, yes; this is a disguised hand; but can you get any of the writing of your cousin?"

"Harvey Hammond?"

"Yes, sir; I could get some of his writing, I think."

"Then do so; and of his wife?"

"I think so, sir."

"Well, I will keep this addressed wrapper in which the money was sent to your landlord and compare it with the writing of Hammond and his wife when you bring me specimens."

"Now, here is a little plan I have mapped out for you to follow, and in doing so assume what disguise you deem best."

And he handed the convict the paper to which he referred, adding:

"Ah! here comes my lieutenant."

The convict started as a quick step was heard on deck, but the old man said:

"Have no fear and remain, for I wish you two to meet."

A moment after Chandos entered dressed in black, as was his wont, and having the appearance of a clergyman rather than a detective.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Chandos and to introduce you to my unknown ally," said the chief.

The two men eyed each other closely; the regular detective regarding the amateur one with strange interest, for "the Unknown," the strange ally of Captain Nero, was as much a mystery to him as was his chief.

"I half believe the old man has this Unknown on me as a spy, and I will place a spy consequently on him to find out," passed through the mind of Chandos.

With but a bow to the Secret Service lieutenant, and a salute to Captain Nero, the convict detective left the cabin without uttering a word.

"I will see that none of my men stop him," said Chandos.

"They will not do so, sir, so please remain," answered Captain Nero, and as Chandos, disappointed at not being able to put a man upon the track of the Unknown, sunk into a seat, the chief continued:

"Now, sir, what luck?"

"Well, sir, to begin with Cadet Markham, he has been gambling heavily and has lost."

"He has also sold out his furniture and bric-a-brac, paid his debts and starts for home tomorrow, with Colonel Markham, who came to the city to-day to place his ward at Madame Holbrook's school."

"This is rather early to begin school, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, but the colonel has taken her there."

"And the cadet goes home with his father?"

"Yes, sir."

"And has paid his debts?"

"Yes, sir."

"Breaks up his rooms?"

"Yes, Captain Nero."

"Well, you must take this in hand, Chandos, and find out just what it all means, and I have full confidence that you can do so, and to aid you I give you these papers I received to-day from a secret source of mine, which I cannot now reveal."

"Look them carefully over, and act as you deem best for all concerned."

"Now about your sister's child?"

"I have made no other discovery, sir, and I fear the child is dead, but dare not hint it to my sister."

"No, for I believe the child lives; but about the girl that came to New York to see young Markham?"

"Captain Nero, she has most mysteriously

disappeared, and for the life of me I cannot find any trace of her, though I have been fortunate in discovering one who knows her well."

"Who is this?"

"A boy, sir."

"Boys are dangerous, Chandos."

"Some may be, but I will trust this one."

"Who is he?"

"He calls himself Nabob, is a waif, who has lived about West Point, with no particular home."

"He drove the girl to the city from West Point, and says she was driven from home by her step-mother."

"He was talking to Cadet Markham when I saw him, having just come to the city, to make his fortune, as he said, and met the cadet in the street."

"He wished also to find the girl, he told me, for I entered into conversation with him, and, struck with his shrewdness, at once gave him a place with me, and I brought him with me to-night, in case you wished to talk with him, sir."

"Call him in, if you think you can vouch for him."

"I will do so, sir, with my life," and going to the companionway Chandos gave a whistle, and a moment after Nabob entered the cabin of Captain Nero, the Chief of the Shadowers.

The man gazed with interest into the face of the youth, and then asked in a kindly tone:

"Well, my lad, who and what are you?"

"Nabob, the Boy Detective, and I'm glad to make your acquaintance, sir," was the prompt response of the young waif.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FAIR FELON.

WITHOUT a friend to call upon, for she would not break her word made to Egbert Markham, Flora, the unfortunate young wife of one who sought to rid himself of her, stood her trial in silence, and accepted her sentence with pallid face and aching heart, but with no show of the bitter emotion that overwhelmed her.

Alone in a strange State, registering under an assumed name at the hotel, and with the sachel of a woman in her possession, and which she was charged with stealing, while, unwilling to give any clew as to who or what she was, it was no wonder that Flora was looked upon as a pretty adventuress, and as such she was sent to prison.

Her beauty and innocence were no protection to her among those hard-hearted men of the law, and a search of her trunks revealed only fine clothes, some money, and a few things that were at once set down as stolen property.

Not a slip of paper, nothing to tell who she was, or from where she came, was found, and, determined to die rather than let it be known at home, that she had been arrested as a thief, the poor girl accepted the situation, believing that when Egbert Markham knew all, he would quickly release her and make all clear that she had been misjudged.

"Until he comes I will remain quiet and suffer all in silence," she said to herself.

"And he will surely come, and Nabob will not desert me, I know."

She had written both to the young cadet, and to Nabob, the kind-hearted wife of the village jailer, mailing the letters for her, and then remembering afterward, that she had not taken down the house or address on either.

And so to prison Flora went, and a cell was given her in one wing that overhung the river, the stone structure having been upon the banks of a sheet of water.

It was a pretty view from her window, of water scenery, with the green hills beyond, and the unhappy girl was wont to sit long and close to the iron bars gazing out upon the scene, and wondering why Cadet Markham had not come to her.

It had been weeks since her arrest and imprisonment and yet no word from the cadet or Nabob.

Could it be that her letters had miscarried, or, fearful thought to dwell upon, could it be that Egbert Markham and Nabob believed her guilty and she was to be left to her fate?

The duties of the young prisoner were not very heavy, for she had only to sew a few hours each day, and she did it neatly and with haste, while she asked the matron of the women's ward to give her more work to do.

One day she sat alone in her cell, her sewing lying in her lap, her eyes bent upon the view out of the window.

She started as she heard voices approaching, and said quickly, half aloud:

"How familiar that voice is to me!"

A moment more and the matron threw open her door, and said:

"Can this be your daughter, ma'am?"

The one the matron addressed was a woman beyond middle age, with a form slightly bent, dressed in deep mourning, and with gold spectacles.

She stepped into the cell and glanced in upon Flora, while she said:

"No, ma'am, that hain't my gal; but what a pity ter see so young and pretty a critter in jail."

"Lor', what kin she hev done?"

Flora's face flushed crimson, and she looked away, while the matron said:

"She was sentenced for stealing, ma'am, but some of us don't believe she is guilty."

"Thank you for those kind words," said Flora, while the tears came into her eyes, and turning to the visitor she said:

"Nor am I guilty, for I did no wrong intentionally; but I must suffer because I have no one to lefriend me."

"Poor leetle gal; waal, I'm a-lookin' fer my darter as is missin', an' some said as she were a wayward piece, she might hev got inter prison; but I hain't found her here, and I'm sorry fer you."

"But you has a mighty pretty room, ef it are a prison cell, and ther view are a grand one; but thet makes yer the more anxious to git out, I reckon," and she went over to the window, gazed out a minute, and then, with a "Good-by, miss," to Flora, followed the matron to the corridor, along which the two passed.

With her eyes full of tears and her heart aching, Flora turned to the window, started, sprung forward and took up a letter which she saw there on the stone sill.

Her face flushed and paled by turns, as she read the address, written in a straggling hand:

"Fer

MISS FLO'A,

Pennylenshyarry."

"But one person I ever knew wrote like this, and that one is Nabob."

"Ah! now I recall the voice—that woman in black was Nabob!"

With trembling hands she broke open the letter and read, written in Nabob's peculiar style:

"DEER MISS FLO'A:—

"When you reads this, you'll know I ain't sich a ole woman as I looks, for ther visitor to yer prison sell were no more a pussion then your old friend Nabob from ther Point."

"I had left thar when yer letter comed, and hed gone inter b'z in Knew York, when one day I met Postmaster Drew on ther street, he beln' down to town on some biz o' his own, and he tells me thar were a letter in his post-office fer me."

"Now I hed never received no leter, and I were cu'r'us ter know who had writ ter me, and so it come to mind that you had promised ter do so, and I takes the boat up to ther Point to git my letter."

"It were from you, and it told me just what trouble you was in."

"Now ther biz I were follerin' were shadowin' folks, or yer might say being a Secret Service man, ef a boy kin be a man, and I'd been tryin' ter find yer ever since I went ter York."

"I hed met Cadet Markham on ther street and he told me as how you had gone as a governess to a Southern fam'ly, and he didn't know whar you was."

"Then he left New York and went back home, or to ther Point, and I got inter ther shadder biz, as I said."

"When I got yer letter I writ ther cadet at once, tellin' him all about yer trouble, and thet I were goin' ter come up here and git yer out."

"Then I told my folks I works for about yer, shows 'em yer letter, and they sent me here ter see how yer come ter git inter trouble and all that."

"I hadn't been here long afore I seen thar were some kind o' a plot ag'in' yer, ter my mind, and so I goes to ther city, rigs up as yer see me in yer sell, and determined ter git a leetle talk with yer, and leave this letter."

"Now nobody here knows who you is, for you has kep' as dark as a nigger's skin on thet subject, and I intends ter get yer out, so keep yer eyes open fer anything thet may tarn up, for I hain't come here ter settle."

"This is all I hes ter say now; but you be ready ter travel ef I says so."

"Your true friend,

NABOB."

Such was the boy's letter, and over and over again did poor Flora read it, until her eyes were red from weeping.

Burying her face in her hands, she sat a long time thus, until the clang of the prison supper-bell aroused her.

She went mechanically to her supper, returned to her cell, heard the clank of the lock as her door was closed for the night, and then walked over toward the window.

The waters were dotted with boats, and the sun was fast sinking behind the horizon of hill-land far over on the other shore.

Suddenly she started, for her eyes fell upon a skiff close inshore near the prison, and it held a single occupant.

"It is Nabob!" broke in a hoarse whisper from her lips.

And Nabob it was, no longer in his feminine attire, but dressed like a fisher-lad, and with half a dozen fishing-lines out around his boat, and which he was attending to with seeming interest.

He saw her at the window, but made no sign, while a moment after she beheld him pick up a bow and arrow from the bottom of the boat.

He seemed to know that her eyes were upon him, for he tied a line on the end of the arrow, and then hid it from view, while he glanced up at the window.

Flora knew that Nabob had been noted in the village for his dead-shot shooting with a bow and arrow, and she felt that he meant to use his skill as a means of communicating with her.

She waved her hand and nodded her head, to show him that she understood him, and then he

quietly went on with his fishing, pulling in from time to time a fine fish, his actions being watched by other poor mortals from cell windows, and the idle guard on the wall as well.

Gradually twilight deepened, and darkness came upon the scene, a darkness that was increased by clouds that rolled over the heavens, threatening a storm.

Then the boat moved slowly shoreward, though it was not visible to Flora in the gloom, and she stepped to one side of the window, for she knew that the daring boy meant to fire an arrow into her room.

Nor was she mistaken, for there came a sudden *whiz* and a blow, and an arrow dropped upon the floor.

She picked it up quickly and found a string attached.

There was a light in the corridor, but none in her cell, but she felt that she would be able to decipher what Nabob might write, by going to her door, and she did not fear detection, as in the "women's wing" of the prison no close watch was kept while all were locked in their cells.

Drawing in the string she felt quite a heavy weight attached, and, when it at last reached her hand a bundle, neatly done up, was quickly opened.

It contained files, a candle, some matches and a letter.

Lighting the candle, she concealed the glare as well as she could and hastily read the letter, which was as follows:

"DEAR MISS FLO'—
"I made a good old woman to-day, for I seen that even your pretty eyes didn't know me.

"I left ther letter all right, and I were glad ter see that your sell were located prime ter git you out, and that are what I am goin' ter do this night o' our Lord Anny Dominy.

"Now I is to fire a arrier inter yer room, as yer will know, and you pulls up a package o' tools ter work with.

"When you gits ther tools, you may know I has gone, but I will come back ag'in soon for business.

"You let ther string out ther winder ag'in, and then set ter work filin' them iron bars out, so you kin pass through.

"It will be hard work, but you kin do it, I know.

"Keep ther string across yer arm, and when yer feels me give a pull, you draw it up, and it will have a rope ladder on ther end, for I has a man makin' one, and goes back for it as soon as I knows you gits this letter.

"Make ther ladder fast, and then come down, for it hain't but sixty feet and I know you kin do it, as you has undyin' pluck.

"It kinder looks to me like rain ter-night, and I hope it will, for ther guard will be huntin' cover then.

"Now git ter work and look out fer yours truly,
"NABOB."

"God bless the noble boy," cried Flora, as she blew out the candle and walking over to the window gazed out into the darkness, while a misty rain was driven into her face.

CHAPTER XXX.

NABOB'S PLOT.

FOR a long time did Flora stand at the cell-window, unmindful of the rain driving in upon her.

Nabob was her friend, and he had proven it.

But where was her husband, he who should have been by her side in her distress?

The boy had not spoken of him in his second letter, so was working all alone evidently.

She had hoped to leave the prison in honor, that she might triumph over her foes; but it seemed that she could only do so through the coming of Egbert Markham to explain who she was, why she had come there, that he had picked up the valise and handed it to her, making the mistake himself of believing that it was hers and that she was not guilty.

Must she wait for the coming of Egbert, who surely, in her distress, would acknowledge her as his wife and tell all the facts in the case?

Or must she take advantage of the chance Nabob offered her to escape?

She knew the boy would not give up until he had rescued her, and if she did not go then he would try other plans.

He might be discovered and punished, while certainly all seemed well then for her escape.

Innocent herself, she felt that she should not remain there when freedom was before her, and seeking Egbert, she would have him make her name clear with the officials.

So deciding she set to work with one of the files to cut her way out.

Hers was a cool head, and she felt no terror of the descent by the rope-ladder.

Hers was a strong little hand, and she filed deeper and deeper into the iron bar.

She felt no fatigue, though it was a great strain upon her, and she heeded not the driving rain which was wetting her through.

At last one bar yielded, and then she began upon another, for she needed to cut two in twain to get out.

Just as it too was severed a jerk came upon her arm from the line across it.

Instantly she drew upon it, and into the room she drew quite a bulky roll.

It was the rope-ladder. Making one end thoroughly secure she lowered the other slowly to the ground.

Then she made up a bundle from the meager supply of clothing allowed her in her cell, and all being ready for departure she stepped upon the stone sill, crept through the aperture in the iron bars and placed one foot firmly upon the first rope round of the ladder.

Slowly she descended, with perfect coolness, in the darkness, the wash of the waves against the stone walls, and the pattering of the rain driving against her, destroying all sound.

It seemed a long way to the water, but at last a hand grasped her foot, and she was drawn down into a boat, while Nabob said in a whisper with more eagerness than eloquence:

"Bully for you, Miss Flo'!

"Now we'll pull out."

As she sunk down upon a seat in the skiff, he seized his oars, which were muffled, and went swiftly away over the dark, rough waters.

For a long time she uttered no word, and then said softly:

"Nabob."

"Yes, Miss Flo'."

"You have saved me from a living death."

"I never was in jail, Miss Flo', but I guesses it hain't pleasant.

"Anyhow you is out now, and we will soon be safe."

"Where are you going with me, Nabob?"

"To the boat-landin', Miss Flo', two miles from here yet; but we'll go ashore to a fisherman's shanty and rig up, for we would be recognized mighty quick, if it was known you escaped, and any one drove down to the wharf to head us off."

"And have you not seen Mr. Markham, Nabob?"

"Not since I met him, miss, and he told me that lie."

"Oh, Nabob!"

"It was a lie, Miss Flora, and he meant to tell me one, for he didn't wish me to find you."

"But what motive had he, Nabob?"

"I don't know, 'less it were he was afraid I'd tell that you and he was good friends, and he told me a lie about yer bein' a governess and gone South, when he seen yer off himself fer ther East, as I knows."

"How did you know this, Nabob?"

"Oh, I'm a shadder detective now, I is, and I jist found how he had you in fine rooms, and then sent yer out o' town on ther sly."

"I thought you liked Cadet Markham, Nabob?"

"So I did, and so I does, if he means right by you; but if he don't, then he'd better look out."

"Why, Nabob, don't you believe that he means to treat me right?"

"He hain't actin' it if he does, miss."

"I wrote him of my misfortune, when I did you."

"He hain't come, has he?"

"No."

"I has, hain't I, miss?"

"Indeed you have, and served me well."

"I didn't get my letter for some time after, as I told yer; but he must have got his all right."

"It may not have reached him, Nabob."

"He hain't reached you, if it did reach him, miss; but we land yonder where that light is."

"Who is there?"

"An old fisherman as made the rope-ladder for me."

"He's a good old man that I hired a boat from, and seein' he was poor, I give him the job of making the ladder, and asked him to say nothing about it."

"This is his boat, and I told him I was going to run off with my gal, and wanted to come by his shanty, until time to catch the boat, so we'll go there and fix up, for I has a boy's rig for you, and I'll dress up like the old woman, same as you seen me to-day."

"Oh, Nabob!"

"Yes, Miss Flo'."

"You are a strange boy."

"I hain't so bad as I looks, Miss Flo'."

"You are not bad at all; but do you expect me to dress up as a boy?"

"Certain, for you don't want to be found out and get took back to that old stone tomb."

"No, indeed."

"Well, I has all the materials, and we kin git ther fisherman to row us down to the steamboat wharf, and go aboard when it comes along at daylight, and I is to be your mother, and you is to be my boy—see?"

"Yes, I see, Nabob, and the more I see, the more I admire your pluck and genius."

"Oh, I hain't afraid, if that's what you mean, miss; but here we is at the fisherman's landing," and the skiff was run ashore.

Springing out Nabob aided Flora to alight, and led the way to a small hut of two rooms, situated back among a clump of pine trees.

A knock on the door brought to it an old man, rough in appearance, but with a kindly, weather-beaten face.

"I has my gal, cap'n," said Nabob, and he led Flora into the cabin, the fisherman, who dwelt there alone, giving them a warm welcome.

"You has my two carpet-sacks all right, cap'n, for my lady are wet and wishes ter

change her clothes, while she'll put on a different rig, as we don't wish to be found out."

"They are in t'other room, and I built a fire there, too, for the leddy," said the fisherman, and Nabob led the way.

"Here's traps for you, and a wig and hat to hide yer long hair, Miss Flo'."

"When next I sees yer you'll be a boy, I guesses, so jist sing out when you is ready, and ther cap'n will row us over to ther steamboat wharf, and we has jist about two hours to git there," and Nabob, with an air of dignity, drew a watch from his fob and glanced at the time.

Within an hour Flora came into the room, and no one would have recognized her in the suit of boy's clothing she had on and with her beautiful hair concealed beneath a wig.

In the mean time Nabob had rigged out in the mourning dress and bonnet in which he had visited the prison, and the old fisherman said:

"I guesses ther leddy's pa wouldn't know neither one o' yer now."

"I guess not, cap'n; but now we'll strike out for ther wharf, ef yer'll let us have yer stout coats so we won't git wet."

It was a long, rough pull over to the steamboat wharf, but the fisherman pulled a good oar and they reached there some little time before the boat came along and without getting wet.

"Here, cap'n; you better not be seen with us, but go right back home, and jist salt this away for a rainy day, for you deserves it."

And Nabob placed a purse of gold into the hand of the old man, who warmly thanked them and wished them good-luck.

"Here we are! now come on board, Miss Flo'," said Nabob, as the people who were to land there came ashore.

"Miss Flora! Did you hear that old woman call that boy *Miss Flora*?" asked a man quickly, turning to one who had just stepped off the gang-plank with him.

"I did hear it, and—"

"Come, we will return on board and see what it means, for it is my opinion that *boy is a girl!*"

And taking the arm of his companion the first speaker drew him back on the boat which, half an hour after, cast loose her ropes and went on her way; but on board of her were Nabob and Flora in disguise, and also the two whose attention had been attracted to them by the boy's unlucky remark as they stepped on the gang-plank.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

IT was as Chandos, the Shadow Detective, had told his chief, Captain Nero, that Colonel Markham had come down to the city with his ward and placed her at Madam Holbrook's fashionable boarding-school, while Cadet Markham had returned home with his father.

The colonel had questioned his son most closely as regarded the life he had been leading and told him frankly he could not understand how it was that he could live in such elegance on the amount that he allowed him.

Then Egbert became repentant and confidential and told his father he had been led to gambling a little, and always had been most lucky.

"But, father," he continued, "I realized some time ago how foolish I was, and decided to change my ways, and have done so."

"To begin with, I sold out my establishment several days ago, discharged my servants, paid all my debts, and determined, after a few days' visit at home, to go to the Academy and study hard."

"I am delighted to hear you say this, my son, for I confess I have been most anxious about the life you have been leading of late."

"Of course you know that my influence gained you a sick leave from the Academy; but it will stand greatly to your credit if you return before it has run out."

"But do you owe much in the city?"

"Not a dollar, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I am glad to know this, for you have been very extravagant; but now to Mary Marengo."

"Well, father."

"Are you willing to ask her to be your wife?"

"Yes, sir."

"She is very beautiful and an exceedingly lovely girl, though a little given to satire."

"I rather like that in her, father."

"It is not a pleasant trait in a wife; but then you can soon break her of this."

"Indeed, I can, sir; but is she as rich as it is said?"

"The judge says she is worth fully a million."

"Indeed?" said the delighted cadet.

"Yes, and she really admires you, while she will do as the judge says regarding accepting you, as her father's will left him the authority of a father, to give her fortune to charity, if she married other than the judge selected before the time when she was to get control of her inheritance."

"And when will this be, sir?"

"Within seven months, I believe."

"Then you wish me to marry her within that time?"

"I think it would be wise to at once address her, become engaged, and get married about the time you graduate."

"After you get your commission as a lieutenant you can resign, or remain in the army if you wish."

"I think I shall resign and settle down to take care of my estates, for naturally, father, I may look to you for a marriage allowance?"

"Certainly, as you know, my son."

"And, father?"

"Yes, Egbert."

"May I not carry to the fair Marengo a handsome present?"

"Certainly."

"Ahem! as I have paid all my debts here, it has left me a little flat in finances, sir, so—"

"Ah, yes, I will give you the money; but how much will you need?"

The cadet was buried in deep thought for a moment.

He did not know how much his father would stand, and he was afraid to state a sum, for fear he might fall under what the colonel would give him.

So he cautiously felt his way with:

"I think a young lady who is heiress to so large a fortune, father, should be worthy of an elegant gift."

"True, and you can get for her a gift of the value of two thousand dollars," and the colonel gave that amount to his son, and they parted, Egbert promising to meet his father at the hotel to dine, and start home with him in the family carriage early the next morning.

But the young cadet with funds in hand was anxious to have more, that he might extricate himself from his financial difficulties at the jewellers, with Sly Steve, who held his note and ring, and the mysterious man who held the I O U contingent upon his marrying Miss Marengo.

Then, too, he had other urgent uses for money just then, which the story will develop, and he was by no means as contented in mind as he would have had his father believe.

So around to the Gold Cage went Egbert, instead of to the jeweller's, and he quickly found a desirable partner for a game of cards.

After a few hours spent there the reckless young man left it with scarcely a dollar, and minus a handsome ring and scarf-pin, while his heart was as heavy as lead, as he muttered to himself:

"I have not had the nerve to use my duplicate cards on any one since that accursed sailor detected me in doing so, and hence, depending upon chance wholly, I lose."

But he met his father at a late dinner, and the two started home the next morning, the cadet keeping up a forced flow of spirits.

His mother welcomed him warmly, for she knew not the blackness of her son's heart, and his sister Edith, kissing him when she met him half an hour after, said as she led him out upon the piazza:

"Don't speak of the old tramp, brother, if you do not wish mother to show a temper I never dreamed she possessed."

"Bother the old tramp, sis! but has he been here again?"

"No, indeed, though Mercer saw him in the neighborhood once."

"No!"

"Yes, and he rode up to him and called him uncle, asking him when he was coming to visit us at Markham Manor, for we were pining to see him."

"Did he reply?"

"Yes, he said we might expect him some day, and walked on, Mercer said."

"The old vagabond may mean mischief, loafing about here, and I will speak to the village authorities to have him arrested."

"Don't do it, brother, for then he will tell them he is father's brother and we will be disgraced by having such a relation."

"That is true; but have you seen Miss Marengo lately, sis?"

"Yes, she rides, or drives over often, and says she misses dear Alice so much."

"Do you think Miss Marengo is sweet on me, sis?"

"How could she help it, when you are just the dearest fellow in the world, Egbert?"

"Thank you, sister; but I hope she feels as you do."

"I hope so, too, for she is awful rich, and very beautiful, though I am a little afraid of her; but you, as a soldier, can govern her, can't you?"

"Oh yes."

"And father told mother, just now, that you had bought her a beautiful gift, for two thousand dollars."

"Ahem! yes."

"And he said you would not show it to him; but you will to me, won't you, brother mine?"

"Yes, some time, but not now; the fact is I am having something made, for I could find nothing that pleased me."

"Oh, I know it will be just too lovely for anything, for you have such good taste, brother; but father told mother something else

about you, for my door was open and he did not know I was in the room."

"What was it, Edith?" somewhat anxiously asked the cadet.

"That you had finished sowing your wild oats, had stopped living such a fast life, had sold your bachelor furniture, discharged your cook and valet, and intended to be so good now."

"Yes, I do."

"And father said you had stopped wearing jewelry, for you thought it in bad taste, and wore only your watch and fob-chain."

"So I do, yes, so I do," and the cadet's face flushed.

"Then you'll let me wear that beautiful diamond ring you had, won't you, for I'll give it back to you, whenever you want it, and I suppose that Mary Marengo will get it?"

"Ah yes, and—that is—in fact, Edith, I feared I would lose those things, and so got a friend of mine, a cashier in a bank, to put them away safely for me; but come, dinner is announced, and I am really quite hungry," and the cadet led the way into the dining-room, and the meal passed off pleasantly, for Mrs. Markham was in quite a lively mood for her, of late, and the colonel unbent from his accustomed soldierly dignity and cracked jokes with his children, until an unlucky remark brought a cloud over all, for Egbert said:

"I really miss Alice."

"I am glad she has gone," Edith rejoined.

"My child, Alice never did you any harm," Mrs. Markham said, reprovingly.

"Oh, mother loves Alice dearly, Egbert, and father is paying as much for her education at Madam Holbrook's as he did for mine," Edith retorted.

"That is decidedly wrong, for she is little more than a pauper, and father is too kind to throw his money away upon her," said Egbert, and stern and sharp came the reply from Mrs. Markham:

"Egbert, your father is the best judge of how he should spend his money, and all that goes for poor, dear little Alice is her just due."

"Great God! what do you mean, Estelle?" cried the colonel, excitedly.

"I mean that the child was left to your guardianship, and her father believed he left her rich, and, as he was your devoted friend, it is her due, with all your wealth, that you give her at least a good education, to enable her to support herself if need be."

"Ah, yes, true! I did not understand your meaning, wife, and thought you were casting censure upon me, when I desire to do all in my power for the poor child, and I will, yes, I will, as long as my guardianship lasts."

After this little breeze a silence came which was broken by Egbert remarking that he would drive over to see Miss Marengo.

All knew what this meant and that he intended to offer her his heart, hand and whatever his father gave him in the way of a fortune.

"When she accepts me I will go back to the Academy, for somehow things don't run smoothly at home."

"There is mother, who was ever so sweet in the past, now seeming to carry a chip on her shoulder, and Edith says there will be a volcano if I speak of our old vagabond uncle or run Alice down while mother can hear it."

"I don't like this way, too, of being questioned about my jewelry and asked about that present for Mary Marengo."

"I gambled away my jewelry, all but my watch, and the money that was to go for the present, so what am I to do?"

"Why, only to have such a good report sent home that the governor will give me a stake if I ask it."

"Bah! but what will a few hundred, or a thousand or two, such as he would give, do for me in my present misfortune?"

"Next to nothing, and I have got to raise a large sum."

"Now to make my paper for the future good by engaging myself to the fair Marengo."

Making his toilet with exceeding care and looking his very best, Egbert got into the family carriage and drove over to Judge Garlo's elegant house.

He was not in the least nervous, and as he turned to meet the heiress when she glided into the room felt that the maiden was already won; but her first words caused him to start back, his eyes to become fixed, and his whole form to tremble, for she said eagerly:

"Oh, Mr. Markham, I am so glad to see you, and it was so kind of you, so more than generous to send me this superb necklace."

"See! I have put it on for you to see how I prize it!"

Egbert groaned; for it was the necklace he had bought and pawned!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A REFUSAL AND A REQUEST.

"WHY, Mr. Markham, what can be the matter, for you seem completely upset?"

"Are you ill?" asked Mary Marengo, when Cadet Markham showed the emotion he did, at suddenly beholding upon the beautiful neck of

the maiden, the very diamond necklace which he had purchased on credit for fifteen thousand dollars, and afterward pawned for twelve thousand.

There was no mistaking it, for two such unique pieces of rare ornament had scarcely been made, and besides, had not the maiden just said that she thanked him for it?

Egbert Markham had a cool head, and he knew that he was perfectly sane; but how in the name of all he held dear could such a thing happen?

It was no wonder that he was nonplused wholly, that he was utterly overwhelmed by the startling circumstance.

He had placed his redemption ticket for the sum, with interest, in his pocket-book, and then had put it away among private papers in his desk, which he always kept locked.

Without that ticket the necklace could not have been redeemed, and had it been, who would have brought it to Mary Marengo?

Had his father really known all that had occurred and done this to teach him a lesson?

This seemed his only solution of the mystery, and he passed his hand across his brow, rallied from his surprise and turned toward the maiden, who stood before him, looking grandly beautiful in her superb evening dress, and with the jewels flashing upon her exquisite neck.

Of course the emotion shown by the young cadet had not taken but a few moments of time, and when he became calm, though he was yet pale, he said:

"I am more than glad to see you again, my dear Miss Marengo; but I had not anticipated the surprise of finding you wearing that necklace."

"Why, did you not send it to me to wear?" and she arched her brows most prettily.

"May I ask when you received it?"

"Only two hours ago."

"And how?"

"By the clerk of the store where you got it."

"The clerk?"

"So he represented himself."

"Describe him, please?"

"A man of thirty, I should judge, with full black beard, black hair, and strangely penetrating eyes."

"A very handsome man, I thought, very much of a gentleman, with elegant manners and a winning smile."

"You seem to have regarded him most carefully!" said the cadet, with something of a sneer.

"Indeed I did, for I could not help it, and it is dangerous to send home a purchase by a man so fascinating."

"May I ask what he said to you?"

"That you had purchased this beautiful necklace for me, and that he had brought it, as it was too valuable to send by ordinary messenger, and he wished to know if I desired any alteration in it, as regarded the clasp, the length of the star pendant and, in fact, if it suited me wholly."

"And then he departed?"

"Why, certainly, for he was not a guest."

"I thank you, Miss Marengo, and I hope you will pardon my rudeness in questioning you; but that necklace was a surprise that has wholly gone wrong."

"Then it was not intended for me?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, yes; but I meant to have an inscription placed upon it, and supposed the jeweler so understood."

"Then he was to send it to you, and yet not until he heard from me."

"I understand now that he made a mistake, in delivering it at once?"

"Yes."

"And I am to return it to you?"

"Oh, no!"

"But for the inscription?"

"I can have that put on later."

"May I ask what the inscription is to be?"

"Simply the French words, '*Le jour viendra*'."

"You think the motto appropriate, Mr. Markham?"

"I hope so, Miss Marengo, from my inmost heart," he said, earnestly, and taking her hand he led her to a seat, while he continued in an impassioned way:

"I did not intend you should see that necklace until I had asked of you a question."

"That question I came this afternoon to ask, and now I will do so."

"It is, Mary, if you will believe in my love for you and become my wife some near day in the future?"

She looked him straight in the face, and asked quietly:

"Do you really love me?"

"I do, Mary, with all my heart."

"Suppose I told you that I had not a dollar in the world, was not the heiress men supposed, and that I was only a poor girl?"

"But, Mary!"

"Suppose you knew this to be so, would you love me then?"

"Why, Mary, I—"

"I see that you turn pale, that you flinch under such a possibility, so I will relieve

mind by saying that I am an heiress, I am very rich, richer than the world believes."

"Ah, Mary!"

"I see that your face brightens up, Cadet Markham, and it proves to me that your love is full of dross."

"Oh, no, Mary, my love is pure, sincere, and were you as poor as you say I would love you the more."

"And do you ask my love in return?"

"You know that I do, Mary."

"You wish me to become your wife?"

"Yes, Mary; but how matter-of-fact you are about it."

"Marriage makes love most matter-of-fact, so why be silly now?"

"But you will love me, Mary?"

"No!"

He started and gazed with a look of almost horror at her.

"Mary!"

"Egbert!"

"You will love me, I asked you!" he faltered.

"And I answered no!" was the calm reply.

"You are but playing with me?"

"If I was, I would have said yes."

"Then you do not care for me?"

"Not in the slightest degree."

"Mary!"

"Well?"

"You surprise me."

"I am glad; for you are a young man that has not been surprised in that way before, I should judge."

"Miss Marengo, may I ask if you are trifling with the love I offer you?"

"I am not."

"Then why act as you do?"

"You ask me to love you?"

"I do."

"And I say I cannot."

"You will at least try?"

"No."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"You refuse to be my wife?"

"Most certainly."

"Is this final?"

"Assuredly."

"And yet you accept that necklace?"

"I did not say so."

"You wear it, though?"

"I try on a cloak, a bonnet, and yet they are not mine, until paid for."

"What! do you mean that I have not paid for it?"

And his lips quivered.

"Oh, no; for you are certainly well able to do that, Mr. Markham; I mean that one can have something on and yet not own it, and so I put this on until your coming."

"And you will not accept it?"

"For the present, yes."

"You speak in enigmas, Miss Marengo."

"Permit me to make myself plain, then."

"It is my desire that you will," he said, haughtily.

"Now, you ask me, as I understand it, to be your wife?"

"I do."

"Without my love, would you marry me?"

"Yes; for I love you dearly."

"I see; or my money."

"You seem to take pleasure in unkind words, Miss Marengo."

"I will be more frank, then."

"The fact is, Mr. Markham, I have not an atom of love in my heart for you, hardly friendship, and I will never be your wife."

"Is this plain enough?"

"It is, and I will bid you good-afternoon," and he arose, white with passion.

"One moment, please," she said, in her sweetest way.

He half-turned.

"Be seated, please."

"To be insulted?"

"Pardon me, sir, a lady does not offer insult."

He sat down in silence.

"Now I have a favor to ask of you."

"Well, Miss Marengo?"

"I have discarded you, that is, refused your very polite offer of marriage, and I now wish to make a request of you."

"I cannot understand you, Miss Marengo."

"Because you do not love me as I would wish to be loved, and I do not love you."

"I await your request."

"It is that you allow me to keep this necklace for the present, and that the world be allowed to believe us engaged."

"Miss Marengo, this is a most startling request."

"Is it?" she asked, simply.

"It most certainly is."

"You object then?"

He thought that he held the reins now, and meant to ride hard.

He could not have asked anything better suited to his tastes, for to return home, refused by Mary Marengo, would be a bitter blow to his

that his future hopes depended upon

If she refused to marry him, how about the note he had given, subject to that event?

How could he pay for that necklace?

He was in a desperate situation, and believed to be engaged to Mary Marengo he would have time to look about how to extricate himself.

There was one purpose that he needed ready money for at once, and must have it, and his father could only be asked if he knew he was engaged to Mary Marengo, and failing there, he could run down to the city and raise money on notes, payable at a date after his marriage, and arrange some way to pay them before it became known that such marriage would not take place.

With Mary Marengo now asking a favor of him, he felt that he held the whip-hand, and he meant to make her feel it.

"You object then to grant the request I make of you, in revenge for my refusal of your offer?" she asked.

"Is it urgent that I grant such request?"

"It is most urgent."

"And am I to know your motive for asking it?"

"No."

"I am simply to let the world believe I am engaged to you, for a purpose of your own?"

"That is all the request I made," was the placid response of the beautiful girl.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

"MISS MARENGO," said the cadet, rising and standing before her as she sat upon the sofa and folding his arms upon his breast, "you are a strange girl."

"I know I am not like other girls, Mr. Markham; but let us discuss the question between us."

"Whether I grant your request or not?"

"Yes, sir."

"The request is that we allow the world to look upon us as engaged?"

"Yes, sir."

"When really we are not?"

"Exactly."

"Suppose I say yes?"

"I will thank you."

"For how long a while shall the farce continue?"

"For several months, and maybe not so long."

"That you may carry out certain views of your own?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I say no?"

"I shall be very sorry."

"And what then?"

"I shall first wait to know what you will say."

"It will be no."

"Indeed!"

And again she arched her brows.

"I am sorry," she added.

"And I am sorry, too, not to oblige you," he said, with a malicious smile.

"To oblige me?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"In granting the request."

"It was not for my sake I asked it."

"Whose, then?"

"Yours."

"I cannot comprehend you!" he said, angrily.

"You refuse to let the world believe that we are engaged?"

"Yes."

"So be it, sir. I shall inform my guardian of your proposal, of my refusal, and then carry this necklace back to the one I got it from."

"It would be better to return it to the donor," he remarked, with a sneer.

"I shall do as I deem best in the matter: return it to the one that loaned it to me."

"Loaned it to you?" he gasped.

"Yes, for a purpose."

"Miss Marengo, I cannot understand you."

"The best way to do so is not to try and play a game of bluff, as gamblers call it, with me."

"I know that you are most anxious to have us seem engaged, before the world, and I am willing to gratify you, when lo! you say you will not grant my request, so I say do not then, and let the result appear."

He fairly trembled before this calm, beautiful girl.

He saw that he was no match for her.

He felt that she held some secret of his, or was herself playing a "game of bluff," a gambling term he knew full well the meaning of.

He had believed that he was master, and he found he was mistaken.

So he said, in a voice that was anxious:

"My dear Miss Marengo, let us compromise."

"Well, sir."

"You have refused my hand, and yet wish to have us appear to be engaged?"

"Such is the case."

"I am willing."

"You are wise."

"Now I will return to the Academy very

soon, and when you get tired of this by-play, write me a letter, ending it."

"I will."

"Now kindly restore to me that necklace, and let the matter end between us personally, while I give out that you are to be my wife."

"Spread the announcement, sir, and I will keep the necklace as a gift from you."

"But I cannot afford such a gift to one who is not to be my wife," he said, in a sullen tone.

"You had never spoken of love to me, and yet you bought it for me, so I will keep it until the farce between us ends."

"I prefer that you return it."

"And I will not do so."

He bit his lips vexatiously, and then said:

"As you please, and I bid you good-day."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Markham," and she arose and bowed low.

He left the parlor, called to his waiting coachman and drove rapidly homeward, his face clouded with bitter emotions.

"Am I to congratulate you, my son?" asked Mrs. Markham, as he sprang from the carriage upon arriving at home.

"Yes, mother," and she kissed him, while she said:

"Something worries you, my son."

"Well, mother, I bought a handsome present for Mary, and the fool of a jeweler sent it to her before I got there."

"How strange he should do so; and did she refuse it?"

"Oh, no! but there was to be an inscription upon it."

"Well, don't mind it, and let me offer again my warmest congratulations, for I believe Mary Marengo to be a noble girl, and I only hope you will try and prove worthy of her in every respect, for your life has been of late not what I could wish, Egbert."

"Don't lecture me, mother, for I am all over it now, and I'll be so good you will never complain."

"But I wonder if father will not give me a few thousands now, as I wish to make certain arrangements for my future."

"He said he would not give you a dollar over your monthly allowance, until you were married."

"When did he say this?"

"To-day."

"Is father cramped for money, mother?"

"On the contrary, he never was more liberally supplied, for his rentals increase largely, and he just had a remittance for the sale of property in New Jersey he considered almost worthless."

"He had an offer for it a year ago for three thousand dollars, and wanted four thousand; but to-day his agent brought him thirty thousand which he had sold it for to a railroad."

"I am glad to hear it, and I wish it would open his heart toward me."

"He has paid out a great deal of money for you, Egbert."

"Well, I'll pay him back some day, when I marry."

"He does not ask that, but only wishes you would not squander money as you do."

"Perhaps you could let me have a few thousands, mother, as a loan?"

"My son, I believed I was rich when I married your father, and, to my humiliation found out I was left very poor by my father."

"Food and clothes I have taken, as my due, but little else, and not a dollar would I touch of your father's to give you, so ask him."

"You think he will refuse?"

"I do; but you might ask him."

"Where is he?"

"In the library."

Egbert walked quickly to the library, where he found his father assorting a large sum of money, that which the agent had paid him an hour before.

"The king was in his parlor,
Counting out his money,"

sung the cadet with forced gayety as he entered.

"Yes, it is an unexpectedly large sale my agent made for me, and I am putting it away in my strong box; but light the lamps, my son, for I do not wish the servants to come in and see this money in the house."

Egbert did as ordered, and then locked the door, after which he sat down near his father, who said:

"You drove over to Judge Garlo's this afternoon?"

"Yes, father, and Miss Marengo is my promised wife."

"I offer you my congratulations, for she is a fine girl."

"She is indeed, sir, and, though I of course avoided money matters, she told me that she was very rich, far richer than was generally believed."

"I am glad of this, indeed I am," said the colonel, with a smile of avaricious delight.

"She is a treasure, sir, without her riches; but, father?"

"Well, my son?"

"I deceived you in one thing."

"What was it?"

"You gave me some money to purchase a gift?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, I bought one of far more value, for I was tempted by it."
 "I bought, in fact, a diamond necklace, paying what you gave me, and what money I had of my own, and getting credit for the balance."
 "A costly gift."
 "Indeed, sir, but it was worth all I paid for it."
 "How much was that?"
 "Fifteen thousand!"
 "Whew!"
 "It is all paid for excepting six thousand dollars, which I wish to ask you for, sir, along with a little pin money to have at the Academy."
 "I will give you five hundred, my son, for your use at the Point, and will drop in and pay the balance for the necklace when I go to the city the latter part of the week."
 "He will not want the money for some little time yet," said Egbert, with a sinking heart.
 "I have it, so can pay it."
 "When do you go down, sir?"
 "Next Saturday."
 "Well, sir, I thank you, and I will start for the Academy to-morrow— But, see that face at the window!"
 As he spoke, Egbert sprung to the window, and attempted to throw up the sash, while the colonel hastily arose in alarm, for the window was some six feet from the ground, and he knew no one could look in without climbing up upon the stone combing of the house.
 The window catch was hard to move, and it was full half a minute before Egbert got the sash up and looked out.
 All was darkness, and having hastily put away his money in the iron box that was kept in his heavy desk built out from the wall, the colonel joined his son at the window.
 "You saw the face here, my son?"
 "Yes, father, and I will start the servants in pursuit," and he dashed out of the room, followed by his father.
 In a few moments all the men servants about the mansion were scouring the grounds, accompanied by dogs, in search of the one who had appeared at the window.
 Closely questioned, not one of them had looked in, they said, and Mercer was off on a ride with Edith, and had not returned, so neither of them could have been the one to look in.
 "You are sure you were not mistaken, my son, for one to look into that window must have climbed upon the stone work?"
 "True, sir, and that is what he did do."
 "Did you see his face distinctly, my son?" asked Mrs. Markham.
 "Yes, mother, and it was pressed close against the glass."
 "What kind of a face?" she asked.
 "Mother, it was the face of that old vagabond who came here and said he was father's twin brother," was the response of the cadet, and, at his words both Colonel Markham and his wife turned deadly pale.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

"HAMMOND'S HERMITAGE" was the name given to a fine old homestead situated upon the East River, not far from what is now known as Harlem in New York City.
 It was at one time a fine old structure, built of wood, surrounded by ornamental grounds, and was the abode of an old man who had inherited it.
 The owner, Ezra Hammond, the reader knows as the *mauvais sujet* of the Hammond family, who had run off to sea when a boy, and long years after turned up rich.
 He had gone to the old homestead, fitted it up to suit himself, and lived there in quiet comfort, seeming to care for no one in particular.
 A bachelor, he had selected as his heir Harvey Hammond, a young kinsman, whom he soon found out to be a wild fellow, and, changing his mind, had decided upon another one to inherit his large wealth.
 That other was the one who is known to the reader as Fairfax the Convict.
 He was really as near in kinship to old Ezra Hammond as was Harvey Hammond, and he was supposed to be a young man of exemplary habits.
 But the old man lived at his home in his own quiet way, went nowhere, saw hardly any one that called, and thus his dwelling-place became known as Hammond's Hermitage.
 So matters went on, until Fairfax wanted money to help a friend, and asked it of his relative.
 He was refused, and then used the money—two hundred dollars—intrusted to his care, gambled away that which was not his own, and was in despair.
 Then followed the murder of old Ezra Hammond, one night of storm, in his lonely home, and the facts seemed to point at once to Fairfax as the murderer.
 Being the heir, he knew by the death of the old man he would get his fortune.

In financial trouble, he had to do some act to aid himself out of his difficulties, and he learned also that Ezra Hammond, hearing of his having gambled, meant to change his will.
 Nor was this all, for on the floor of the chamber in which the deed had been done, was a sleeve-button bearing the name of the young heir.
 The window was open, the old man lay in his bed, and there was every evidence that a struggle of desperation had preceded the murder.
 A knife-wound was in the heart of the old man, and outside of the window, in the grass, where the murderer had evidently dropped it in his flight, was found an Italian stiletto, known to have belonged also to the young artist, who was the heir of the old man.
 With such things as proof, it was no wonder that Fairfax was tried as the murderer, and though a seeming *alibi* was proven, yet he was sent to prison for life, and the one who inherited the dead man's riches was Harvey Hammond, as the nearest of kin.
 Nor was this all, for he also won the maiden whom his cousin, the convict, loved, and she became his wife.
 They did not, however, go to the Hermitage to live, for it seemed a lonely spot, and the young wife liked not a home where so foul a deed had been done.
 So the old place went to ruin, and the neighbors shunned it.
 One day Harvey Hammond sat in his office down-town, smoking a cigar after a lunch with several friends, for he was much courted for his genial disposition as well as his wealth.
 A man suddenly came in and asked:
 "Is this Mr. Harvey Hammond?"
 "That is my name."
 And the young aristocrat gazed upon his visitor, who was a rough-looking person with the appearance of a sailor.
 "You own the old rookery of Ezra Hammond, don't ye?"
 "I do."
 "You was his heir?"
 "Yes."
 "You got a snug sum by his death, didn't yer?"
 "What is that your business, my man?"
 "You didn't get it all."
 "What do you mean?"
 "He had a bushel of gold hid away."
 "Who are you, anyway?"
 "I'm an old mate of Cap'n Ezra's."
 "What is your name?"
 "Lennox."
 "You sailed with Captain Hammond?"
 "I did."
 "And when did you see him last?"
 "Some weeks before he was murdered."
 "Where were you?"
 "At his house."
 "Where have you been since?"
 "Cruisin' round."
 "And you say he has gold hidden away?"
 "I knows it."
 "Where?"
 "That is what I came to talk with you about."
 "Well, out with it."
 "He told me he had a bushel of gold hidden away, and that he only meant to tell me where it was, so that I might let his heir know, if I seen he was acting right with what he had got by will, and if not, to give it to charity, saving some I took for myself."
 "Now I has had an eye on you, and you seems to act square, and so I come to tell you I'd show you the hiding-place and divide with you."
 "Well, this is a remarkable circumstance."
 "The money's there."
 "How much?"
 "A bushel."
 "Of gold?"
 "Yes."
 "It is a large sum."
 "Of course it is."
 "Well, it is mine."
 "Then go and find it," was the cool remark of the seaman.
 "Ah! that is your game, is it?"
 "Yes, for I do not care to steal the gold, as I could do, and I do not intend you shall have it, unless you give me half."
 "And you will lead me to its hiding-place?"
 "Yes, for half."
 "I'll do it."
 "Then meet me to-night at eleven o'clock on the grounds of the Hermitage."
 "It is a dismal place to go," said Harvey Hammond with a shudder.
 "There is no one to fear, for the folks avoid the place."
 "I know that, and they say it is haunted."
 "May be it is; but I hain't afeerd o' ghosts if you is."
 "I am not afraid, and will meet you there."
 "Will you go by land or water?"
 "I will drive there in my buggy."
 "Better go alone."
 "I will."
 "And I'll go by boat, up the river, so meet me just at the big oak, where the little dock used to be."

"At eleven o'clock?"
 "Yes."
 "I'll be there," and as Harvey Hammond made this remark the strange visitor turned and walked out of the office.
 Left alone, the young man became lost in thought, while he said to himself:
 "How strange about this hidden money, and it accounts for the story that the old man had gold hidden away somewhere, and I certainly did not get as much in cash as I expected I would."
 "Well, let me see about this division with this fellow."
 "He has no right to it, for it is mine, according to the law that turned over to me Ezra Hammond's riches."
 "If it is mine why should I share it with him?"
 "There must be some fifty thousand dollars in gold, as that was the sum the old servants said their master had hinted that he had hidden away."
 "Well, I will not share it equally, but give to that fellow a couple of thousand and that will be liberal enough."
 "If he is not satisfied he can do as he deems best."
 "Yes, I will go prepared to defend that which is my own."
 "Now to arrange for my night's work," and the young man arose, threw away his cigar and left his office.
 He wended his way to a handsome home in the upper part of the city, and entering, was met by a young and beautiful woman.
 It was his wife, she that had been Maud Merton, the one who had loved the unfortunate man who had been sent to prison for life.
 She had been poor, supporting her father, who was a cripple, and her mother, who was an invalid, by painting, for she was an artist.
 She had dearly loved the man who had been sentenced as a prisoner for life, and she had mourned most bitterly for him; but his cousin, Harvey Hammond, had been most kind to her, sympathized with her, and at last offered her his hand and newly-gained fortune.
 She knew that he had been considered wild, was said to be a very fast man; but the times were dull, her paintings did not sell, and so, for the sake of luxuries for her parents, she married Harvey Hammond, frankly telling him she could never love him as she had loved his cousin.
 He was kind to her, and to her parents, one of whom, the father, soon after died, and a year after the mother followed her husband to the grave.
 And so was the young wife left with only her husband to care for, for they had no child, and the memory of her love for the man then behind prison walls, and whom she would rather have had in his grave, though she could not believe him guilty.
 "Well, Maud, I will have to be out late to-night, for I intend to take a drive into the country, so I will take the key of my library door opening in the yard, so as not to disturb any one on my return," said Harvey Hammond, for it was by the side door that he wished to carry his gold into the mansion.
 And entering his library he arranged a secret place in which to hide his gold when he got it, and then looked to his pistols and a dirk-knife that he intended to carry with him.
 Then he ordered a gentle horse to be hitched to a vehicle he used in his country drives, when going fishing and hunting, and left home soon after for the appointed rendezvous.
 It was just the hour when he hitched his horse in the little grove near the house, and made his way toward the shore.
 It was a dark night, the wind sighed dismally about the old mansion, which looked bleak and weird in its desolation, and he hastened along by it with rapid step.
 But suddenly he came to a halt, and he staggered back from a white form that barred his way only a few feet distant, and in a voice of horror cried:
 "God forgive me! it is the spirit of Ezra Hammond!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

AGAIN do we find Captain Nero in his weird quarters, upon the old anchored brig.
 He has made himself as comfortable as possible in his surroundings, for the cabin has no longer that desolate appearance it once had; but still he has not changed apparently.
 His hair and beard are still unkempt, his attire such that barely a beggar would envy, and he wears the same look of stern sadness that seems indelibly stamped upon his face.
 His desk is covered with papers, and he seems not to fear being disturbed in his retreat.
 Up in the old mansion the convict still has his home, leaving it only as he goes off on detective work, in the endeavor to find out who it was that murdered old Ezra Hammond, and of which he was proven guilty and sent to suffer behind iron bars until death came to his aid.

In the city Chandos had his office of Secret Service, kept his men constantly at work on various duties that came in his way, but devoted himself and one or two of his best shadowers, to finding out certain clues he needed.

For instance, he had never yet been able to find out what his sister's husband had done with her child, and why his money had never been discovered when he was supposed to be rich at the time of his death, which Chandos knew to have been from no accidental discharge of a pistol, as stated, but from a knife.

Who was that murderer he sought to know, and to this and the other affairs hinging upon it, he devoted his particular attention, as well as one other of his special men.

Nor did he in any way slight the work laid out for him by his chief, Captain Nero, for he kept men shadowing all of the name of Markham, and the young cadet was especially under his espionage.

The bills coming due at the office were always promptly paid, the men received their salaries regularly, and money was on hand for any work that needed expenditures, while matters were so shaping as to cause Chandos to feel satisfied, and rejoice at his having met the vagabond chief whom he knew only as Captain Nero.

So matters stood when Captain Nero is again seen in his cabin quarters on the wreck.

Suddenly a slight tinkle was heard, and instantly Captain Nero arose, for he had ingeniously arranged a line about the brig that, when touched by an approaching boat, it gave him warning.

Stepping back into the shadow of the cabin Captain Nero waited, and soon a step was heard on deck, then a man descended the companion-way into the cabin.

It was Chandos and the chief came forward to meet him, greeting him pleasantly and then saying:

"You have some news, Mr. Chandos?"

"Yes, chief, I have; and which will you hear of first, the young cadet, of Nabob, or the trace I have found regarding my sister's husband?"

"The latter, as I am most anxious to learn if my ideas on that subject were correct."

"They were, chief, I am happy to say, for I went to Madam Holbrook's, saw the young girl and had a long talk with her, getting the localities where she had lived and tracing all from that, for she had no likeness of her father."

"Well?"

"So I went to my sister and asked her for a miniature likeness of her husband, and this I took to the young girl, and instantly she recognized it."

"This seems proof positive."

"Yes, sir; but I wished to be sure, and so I asked Madam Holbrook to allow me to bring a lady to call with me, one whom I desired to hear my system of teaching, for you must know I secured the position of French teacher in place of the *bona fide* one who, when offered a large bribe by me, pretended to be called away South on business, and asked me to take his place."

"It was in devoting extra time to little Alice that I saw her alone, told her I came from you, and won her confidence to tell me all."

"I did not tell my sister why I wished her to go to the school with me, said simply I wished her to hear my French classes there, and as she speaks French like a native, as I do, she was glad to go."

"In this way she met Alice face to face."

"I saw her start, then observe the girl attentively, and then she seemed nervous and ill-at-ease."

"Alice is a remarkable likeness of my sister Daisy and of her father, and this is what impressed her so at seeing her."

"When alone with Alice in the extra lesson I saw that beyond doubt Alice was Daisy's child; but I said nothing, and when we parted my sister kissed her warmly."

"Oh, brother! that child is the image of my husband," she said, the moment we left the school."

"That was proof sufficient in itself," said Captain Nero.

"Indeed it was, and on the right track I quickly found out that the man who married my sister secretly bore the name of Randolph V. Randall."

"The V for Victor?"

"Yes, chief; and after he stole his child from her mother, or rather kept her out of her way, he let the girl be known by the name of Alice Victor only."

"I see."

"Now Colonel Markham, I am sure, knew him by his right name; but he took his child into the family as his ward, under the name of Alice Victor."

"Without doubt."

"I am sure he cared not to have others, not even his wife, know just who the child was, as Randolph V. Randall was a gambler."

"Now we know just where my sister's child is, and I desire to ask you if I shall not go to Colonel Markham, tell him all I know, and make him give Alice up?"

"Not just now, for there is more to be done about it."

"I am in the dark as to what it is, chief."

"The child's father was supposed to have left her a large fortune?"

"Yes, but—"

"But it turned out that he did not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure he did not?"

"Had he done so the colonel would have known it."

"Did he say what was left?"

"A few personal effects, some town lots, and in all enough to give her an income of six hundred a year, which Colonel Markham holds for her."

"Did you find out what Randall was supposed to be worth?"

"It was said he kept his money in banks, and was supposed to have several hundred thousand."

"Do you know that he did not have?"

"No, chief."

"Well, assume that he had, and get what proof you can."

"Then go to Colonel Markham, tell him what you know of Randall, how he died, and what he left, and ask him to quietly turn over the guardianship of the girl to her mother, whom you can in the mean time tell that you have found her child."

"If Colonel Markham does not obey, and give to you a draft for all that Randall left, then at once arrest him."

"Why, chief?"

"Do as I say."

"You know that he did not give credit for what Randall left?"

"Arrest him, and at night, and bring him here."

"After that is attended to, you can hunt down the slayer of Randall."

"Yes, chief."

"Now to the cadet?"

"I have shadowed him, in every instance, as you directed, and he has gone back to the Academy."

"Then he is safe for the present; but what of the lady?"

"Miss Marengo?"

"Yes."

"She is engaged to Cadet Markham."

"Ah! that is good; and the valet, Talbot?"

"Is at the inn at the village, pretending to be an artist."

"Better still; but what of Nabob?"

"Chief, I fear trouble has befallen the boy, and the lady as well."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir, for Nabob did his part splendidly, for one of my men returned to-night, from the town, with the news that the young lady had been rescued from the prison in a most bold manner, and that a youth and old lady, supposed to be the fair prisoner and her rescuer, had been seen boarding the steamer at night."

"But a deck-hand told my shadower that two men had been watching them, and had been seen talking with them, and, the following day the captain of the boat had hailed a fishing-craft, at the direction of one of these men, and the four had gone on board."

"My man saw the boat's captain, and he said one of the men had told him he was a detective, that the pretended woman and boy had committed some crime, and were to be taken to prison; but they had not been taken back to the town from whence Nabob had escaped with the girl."

"There is trickery here."

"You think so, chief?"

"Yes; but what said your man of the escape becoming known?"

"That it was not known until late the next morning, when the girl was called to breakfast."

"Then of course these two men, who boarded the steamer, could not have been on their track, as prison officials, while, leaving the vessel as they did, proves to me that they were in the pay of some one who wished to be rid of the girl."

"That some one is Cadet Markham?"

"Naturally, for, as Nabob got the letter, written him by the girl, saying where she was, Egbert Markham received the one she spoke of writing him, and he is at the bottom of this, and has outwitted you in playing out his little game, so start two men at once in search of Nabob and the girl, and put another man at West Point to watch every movement made by Cadet Markham, discover what mail he receives and all."

"After you have set these wheels to going, make your call upon Colonel Markham regarding the affairs of Randall."

"Captain Nero, you are a born detective, sir, and but for you I would still be plodding along in an easy way, thinking myself a giant in Secret Service work, where, as it is, I am but a pigmy."

"You are a remarkably good shadower, Mr. Chandos; but I have had more experience than you," returned the chief, in his quiet way, and bidding his young lieutenant good-by, he was again left alone in his cabin; but only for a short while, as soon after another shadower boarded the old brig and sought the strange leader of the Shadow Detectives.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PRISONER.

THE object which had come so suddenly upon the vision of Harvey Hammond, as he passed by the old mansion of Ezra Hammond, on his way to the landing, was indeed a startling one.

Robed in white from head to foot, it yet seemed not to be enveloped in a shroud, or mantle.

It was light enough to see distinctly, especially at that distance, of only a few feet, and Harvey Hammond beheld a tall form, clad in a suit of white, and wearing a high hat of spotless hue.

In the left hand a cane was held, while the right was extended, as though to warn back the bold intruder upon that sacred domain.

The face was white, strangely so, and the new moon, near its setting, breaking through a rift in the clouds, revealed the form with startling distinctness to the eyes of the terrified man, for bold as he was, Harvey Hammond was terribly frightened.

As he shrunk back the white-robed form followed, and, as he turned about to fly, then came in sepulchral tones:

"Hold! you cannot fly from a spirit of the dead."

"Follow me!"

As though feeling that the command could not be disobeyed, the form turned and walked toward the mansion.

"No! no! no! I cannot go! I will shake off this feeling upon me and defy this horrid, mortal or spirit!" said the young man, and he turned on his heel, as though to walk away.

But a mocking laugh checked him, and, in spite of himself he turned again to find the form directly behind him.

"Come you must!" came in the same sepulchral tones from the lips of the spirit like being, and in silence Harvey Hammond obeyed.

He followed his weird guide to the door of the mansion, and into the dark hallway.

There a hand, like ice in coldness, grasped his arm, and he was led on in the darkness.

"No, no, not in there!" he cried, as a door was thrown open, leading into a large room on the left.

"Enter!" came in the deep voice of the ghost-like guide.

Harvey Hammond had no power to resist, and obeyed.

The light within came through the broken windows, but the outline of the room could be seen, and it was furnished, as it had been when old Ezra Hammond had lived there, only dust was upon all, and decay was slowly putting its touch upon carpet, curtains and furniture.

"You know this room, Harvey Hammond?" asked the weird being in deep tones.

"Yes," was the flattering reply.

"You know that within this room old Ezra Hammond was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Who was his murderer?"

No response came, and after a moment of silence the question was asked again:

"Who murdered Ezra Hammond?"

Still no response.

"Again I ask, who murdered Ezra Hammond?"

"Faxon Fairfield."

"Do you know this?"

"He was arrested, tried for the murder, and sent to prison for life," said Harvey Hammond.

"Where is he now?"

"Dead."

"How do you know?"

"He attempted to escape from prison, was shot by the guard, and drowned in the river."

"And you got the inheritance that was to have been his?"

"Yes."

"By what right?"

"The will of Ezra Hammond left all his fortune to Faxon Fairfield; but if he died, or committed any crime, it was to go to the next of kin."

"And you are the next of kin?"

"I am."

"And you came here to-night to get more of his gold?"

"Ha! how know you this?"

"It is given to the spirits of the dead to know all that mortals do."

"Then why ask me who was your murderer, if you are the spirit of Ezra Hammond?"

"To hear you add falsehood to murder."

"Great God! what—"

"Hold! Confess to me why you came that night and showed a hired assassin into this room by yonder window."

"Confess to me why you stole from Faxon Fairfield's studio his Italian stiletto, and robbed him of his sleeve-button, to cause suspicion to fall upon him?"

"Your hired assassin did his work well, and you, to hide all proof that might arise against you, went with him after the deed to his boat, and there dealt him a murderous blow."

"He fell into the water and sunk from sight, and you rowed away in the darkness alone."

"You saw your cousin arrested for the murder, and pretended to befriend him."

"You saw him sent to prison for life, and by the terms of the will of Ezra Hammond, you got the inheritance, for Faxon Fairfield, in the eyes of the law, had committed a crime, and could not have it, even did he get out of jail by pardon."

"You then married the girl that loved Fairfield, and whom he loved, and now you come here by night to get more of Ezra Hammond's gold."

"But no, you will not get it, for I stand in your path, and you are my prisoner!"

As he spoke the white-clad form stepped toward Harvey Hammond, when the latter started back, crying:

"By my life, but you shall die, if dead you be not!"

He drew a pistol from his pocket as he spoke, and would have fired, but suddenly out of the shadow behind him sprang a man, and grasped his arm, and in an instant more iron manacles were upon him.

Then, from an adjoining room a lantern was brought, and to his horror Harvey Hammond saw that the one who had appeared like the ghost of Ezra Hammond was none other than his cousin, Faxon Fairfield, known to the reader as Fairfax, the convict.

"You!" he gasped.

"Yes; and I am not alone, for here is one you may recognize!"

And the convict led his comrade into the view of Harvey Hammond.

The effect was appalling, for the convicted man's teeth began to chatter and his eyes were seemingly bursting from their sockets.

"Never fear, he is no ghost," cried Fairfax, fearing for his reason.

"He is your hired assassin, whom you did not kill as you supposed."

"He fell overboard, returned to consciousness before he was drowned, and swam ashore."

"Poor fellow, guilty of murder as he was, he feared to make himself known to you, thinking he would be hanged and you would escape, having money to befriend you."

"So he hung about the city, by day doing odd bits of work, and by night coming to this dreary place to sleep."

"And here I met him one day, and word by word I got from him his story, and was thus enabled to get you into the net I laid for you."

"It was I that went to your office in the disguise of an old sailor and told you of the bushel of gold that poor old Uncle Ezra left, and it is here, too, in this old house, where I know just how to find it, for he told me of its hiding-place."

"Now, Harvey Hammond, I have suffered the agonies of the accursed through you, and it is your time to feel torture now, so come with me."

"Where?"

"It matters not, but come!"

"Kill me as I stand here, for I know what the end will be."

"What?"

"A rope."

"You have guessed it; but I'll not kill you, so come."

"Where will you take me?"

"To a prison I have for you."

"Curses on you, I can but go."

"Yes; for if you come not willingly I will iron your feet as well as your hands and carry you."

"But write a line to your wife, she that was to have been my wife, telling her not to expect you home for some days and that you send back your horse by this man, who will take the letter in the morning, for I do not wish her to suffer heartache about you until the time comes for her to do so."

"Bah! she never loved me, but always has loved you, and it will doubtless be a joy to her to see me hang," said the man, bitterly.

"That is not her nature, as I remember her; but you are her husband, and write as I tell you."

"Say you have gone on a yachting cruise with an old acquaintance, and that won't be far from wrong, for we leave here by water."

"Do as I tell you, for here are writing implements."

The prisoner silently obeyed, wrote a few lines and addressed them, Fairfax reading what was written to see that he said nothing he did not wish him to say.

"My man, take this to its address in the morning, driving the horse of Mr. Hammond, and leaving him where you deliver the note."

"Then come to this place to-morrow night, and I will meet you, and taking you to the spot where this man is to be held as prisoner, will make you his keeper for the present."

"No danger of getting my neck stretched, sir, is there?" asked the man, who seemed a simple-minded fellow, though gold had led him to commit a cold-blooded murder.

"No, my son, I will, after you have made a sworn statement, before witnesses, of what this man bribed you to do, allow you to go free, paying you for your services, provided you pledge yourself never to return to this country, for so I pledged you my word I would do."

"And I believe you, sir, and I'll mind you same as a child."

"I'll see you to the boat, sir, for I don't wish to drive away now with the wagon, as I'd git to the house afore daybreak."

Down to the shore the three went, Harvey Hammond walking along sullenly between his cousin and the man he had hired as an assassin.

"Now, Harvey, get in there, and I'll take good care you shall not commit suicide," said Fairfax, and he bound his cousin firmly in the boat.

Then he seized the oars and pulled rapidly away, leaving the assassin standing on the shore gazing after them.

It was a long and hard pull to the old brig, for that was the destination of the escaped convict with his prisoner; but at last he reached there and entered the cabin soon after Chandos had departed.

"Ah, Fairfax, it is you, and you are not alone?" said Captain Nero.

"I have a prisoner, sir," was the reply.

"Ah! and who is he?"

"My cousin, Harvey Hammond, sir, the man who sent me to prison for life, hired an assassin to kill old Ezra Hammond, stole my inheritance and robbed me of my wife."

"You told me well, sir, to go to the old homestead to begin work, and this man, a prisoner, is the result," and Fairfax spoke with deep feeling.

"And the gallows will be his end," was the deep response of Captain Nero.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT BURGLARY.

BOTH Colonel Markham and his wife felt uneasy, after the words of their son, telling them whose was the face he had seen at the library window.

In fact, Colonel Markham seemed more ill at ease than his wife or children had ever seen him before, when Mercer and Edith returned home, and reported seeing a man standing in the shadow of the gateway as they entered.

Mercer had called out to him and asked his business, and the man had walked quickly away, deigning no reply.

Mrs. Markham went with the family in to tea, and attended to her duties in her usual quiet manner.

But after the meal she sought her room, threw a shawl about her shoulders and a scarf over her head, and went out of the mansion by the rear door.

She walked cautiously about the house, and seeing no one, boldly took the grand drive down to the gateway.

She approached it without any hesitation and stood there in the shadow, listening.

No one seemed near, and she returned to the house, murmuring to herself:

"Why is Austin here?"

"Can he mean me or mine harm?"

"Heaven only knows, for he has suffered much through my husband and I."

"Ah me! I would that I could help him, for he seems in such deep distress."

"I came out to-night hoping to see him, to turn him from any wrong act, if he meant such, by being here, and to ask him to let us help him."

"But he is gone, and Heaven only knows what may come of all this."

Then she entered the mansion and regained her room unseen.

Edith and Egbert were singing duets, in the parlor, Mercer was reading, and Colonel Markham was pacing up and down the library, his hands clasped behind him, and lost in deep thought.

There she joined him and said quietly:

"Alfred, I have been alone in the grounds, searching for Austin."

The colonel started at her words, and asked quickly:

"Did you see him?"

"No, I saw no one."

"Why did you go?"

"To know why he is here, coming like a thief about our home, and to ask him to let us aid him."

"I only wish that he would; but will he?"

"Heaven only knows; but, Alfred, seek him out in some way and help him, for remember, he is your brother, your twin brother, and all the near kindred you have away from your children."

"He was ragged, a mere vagabond, and he looked so sad, and yet stern, as though he had suffered much."

"He came to us, gray-bearded, in sorrow, in poverty, and our children insulted him, so it is your place to bring him back to health and happiness, and care for him in his declining years."

"Will you not, Alfred?"

"You plead well, Estelle; but I will never let him come here, though I will try to find him and give him some money."

"If he cares to go to work in the city I will get him a place."

"Ah, Alfred! he is older in appearance than you, though only your age, and his life seems to have been full of toil."

"Only a few hundreds a year from your vast riches would keep him in comfort and allow him to rest."

"Well, I'll do what I can for the poor wretch; but he has brought his misfortunes and poverty upon himself, for I offered him a share of my inheritance."

"Now do not speak of him again, Estelle; but if I catch him prowling about my house by night, I'll deal with him severely."

"Beware, Alfred, for the worm may turn against an iron heel."

"Bah!"

And with an impatient gesture Colonel Markham entered the parlor to listen to the singing of Egbert and Edith, who certainly sung delightfully together.

Later in the evening Judge Garlo and Mary Marengo drove over to Markham Manor, the judge desiring to see the colonel on some important business matter, and having asked his lovely ward to accompany him.

Mrs. Markham welcomed the beautiful girl warmly and said softly:

"May you be happy, and Heaven grant he prove worthy of you."

Mary Marengo was touched by the words, especially as she knew that she was practicing a deception, and the tears dimmed her eyes; but she soon rallied, and a delightful evening was passed by all, the judge and his ward leaving by ten o'clock.

Soon after the family retired, the colonel remaining up half an hour longer, when he too sought his room, and by midnight all was in deep repose in and about the mansion.

Suddenly a dark form glided around the library wing, approached the bay-window, through which Egbert had seen a face early in the evening, and leaped lightly to the stone combing several feet from the ground.

After a few moments' delay the window was softly raised and the form bent within, remaining motionless thus for several minutes.

Then the form disappeared within, and soon after a dim light was reflected from the library.

But only for a moment was the light visible, and then darkness followed.

Thus the moments sped by until nearly half an hour had passed, when once more the form appeared at the window, got out and sprang to the ground, then glided away in the darkness.

From some reason Colonel Markham did not sleep well.

He dreamed, he tossed, fretted, and tried in vain to close his eyes in refreshing slumber.

Thus several hours passed away, and in despair he arose, determined to go down-stairs and read awhile, hoping thus to court sleep to his heavy eyelids.

Putting on dressing-gown and slippers, and taking the lamp, he descended the stairs.

As he opened the library door a gust of wind put his lamp out.

"By Heaven! there is a window up in this room, for I closed them all myself."

"Ho, Egbert!" he called out in ringing tones, and instantly his wife's door opened.

"Bring me a lamp, for I came down-stairs and mine has blown out."

"Quick! arouse Egbert, and call up the servants, for there is mischief here."

The colonel's voice rung out as in his army days, and in a moment all in the house were around, Edith and her mother in great alarm.

In a few moments Egbert, half-dressed, came hastily down the stairs, a lamp in hand, and together he and his father entered the library.

The scene that met their gaze caused both to start back and cry out in amazement.

"I have been robbed," cried Colonel Markham hoarsely.

"Yes, the desk has been broken open and the burglar has escaped, for see the window is open," said Egbert.

But Colonel Markham had sprung to his desk, thrown open the door that opened back into the wall, where his iron box was kept, and fairly shouted:

"There were over thirty thousand dollars in this box, and every dollar is gone."

"Yes, the burglar has gotten a small fortune by this night's work, and may every cent he has stolen be a curse to him."

"I wish now I had given you the money you asked for, Egbert, for then that much at least would not have gone into his hands."

"I wish so too, sir; but I will mount a horse and scour the country and see if the burglar has not escaped."

"It will be useless, for he doubtless came by the river, and yet we might try, so hasten to go at once."

"You have been robbed, my poor husband," said Mrs. Markham, now coming into the room.

"Yes, and we hope to catch the thief, for it is near dawn and—"

"Husband!" and the lady laid her hand impressively upon her husband's arm.

"Well?"

"Do not let search be made for the burglar."

"Why, Estelle, have you any sympathy with such a wretch?"

"No, but suppose it should be he whom Egbert saw at the library window early in the evening?"

"By the Lord Harry, but you solve the mystery, Estelle, for the burglar was none other

than my vagabond brother, who thus got his revenge."

"No, no, Alfred, do not say that, for I cannot believe poor Austin would do such a deed of wrong."

"I only feared that if you start the officers now in pursuit, they might find Austin somewhere near, perhaps asleep on our grounds, and he would be at once suspected and arrested."

"And they would be right."

"If suspected, though no money was found upon him, it would come out just who he is, and do you wish this?"

"No, no, I do not, for I would be disgraced among all who know me, when it was known such a being was a brother of mine."

"No, we will wait until morning, and then see what is to be done, and I will so explain to Egbert, but this loss is a bad one, for rich as I am, thirty odd thousand dollars are a large amount to lose."

"You have at least the satisfaction of having just gotten it, and unexpectedly so, from the sale of lands you believed almost worthless."

"True, but yet it is a heavy loss," and the colonel sat down to look over his desk and see just what had been taken.

But he missed only money, and replacing his papers, went up to try and rest, leaving the lamp burning.

But little sleep had visited the eyes of the occupants of Markham Manor that night, and all were up for breakfast without having to be thrice called, as was often their wont.

"Well, father, I go to-day to West Point, and I am determined you shall hear only the best of reports regarding me," said Egbert at the breakfast table.

"I sincerely hope so, my son," was the answer, and soon after the young cadet bade good-by to all, and started to the landing, accompanied by a servant bearing his baggage.

The boat came along, and he went on board, waving a farewell to his mother and sister, who stood on the bank watching the steamer as she sped by, for the landing was half a mile below the mansion.

Arriving at the landing below West Point, the young cadet went ashore, and securing a vehicle and driver, started to drive on to his destination, from some strange reason of his own.

It was dark when he reached the village, where he had told Talbot, his valet, to rusticate as an artist, and that worthy was the first to meet him, and what he said to him in a short whispered conference, seemed to change Egbert Markham's plans, as he at once returned to the vehicle, and told the driver to start back rapidly the way he had come.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CAPTURED.

It is time now to return to our two young friends in their strange disguise.

I refer to that most shrewd and peculiar youth, Nabob, and his fair companion, Flora, the wife of Cadet Egbert Markham.

It will be remembered, by my kind reader, who has followed me thus far in this story of crime, love, hate and mysterious heritages, that Nabob and Flora boarded a steamer by night in a storm, after having left the hut of the old fisherman, where the maiden rigged herself out in a boy's suit, which her bold young rescuer had procured for her, while he was robed in the garb of a woman in deep mourning.

Now Nabob made a better-looking woman, as far as a disguise went, than Flora did a boy, for the latter was rather awkward in her male attire, and clung to the one she was supposed to be a protection to.

It will also be recalled that Chandos told how one of his men had discovered how two persons had joined Nabob and Flora upon the boat.

These two were the men who had come off of the gangplank at the landing, just as the youth and Flora went aboard, and heard the remark of Nabob to his companion.

The two men were not attractive-looking individuals, and they quickly sought Nabob and Flora out, after they returned on board.

Nabob had made up his mind to go on a short distance on the boat, and then land, take a vehicle in the early dawn and drive to some secluded spot to pass the day, continuing their way by stage coach by night, and thus elude all pursuers.

He saw the two men talking together, and looking suspiciously at Flora and himself, and his heart beat anxiously, and he was sorry he had not remained hidden in the old fisherman's hut for a few days.

Presently the men advanced to where Nabob sat by a table, Flora being near, and one of them said, gruffly:

"Is you going far, ma'm?"

"Now what business are thet o' yourn, raister, whar me an' my sonny are a-goin'?" answered Nabob in the shrill key of an old woman.

"Waal, it is my business, for I is an officer of the law," was the reply.

"Now what do I keer fer thet, when I is as innercint o' doing wrong as a baby?"

"You git out, mister, and let me and sonny alone, or I'll call the capting to put you off on a rock, and he'll do it if I says so."

The man looked at his comrade with the appearance of one who had made a mistake, for Nabob had played his part well.

But the other said:

"Them's the cattle, Chum, and you'll find it so when we tries ther boy."

"Come, sonny, what's your name?" and he turned to Flora.

But Nabob came to the rescue promptly with:

"My sonny are deaf as a post, and ter make him hear yer, yer'd wake up all ther passengers in ther state-room."

"Now his name are Powhatan Pomeroy, I bein' ther Widder Pomeroy from Bellows Falls, Vermont, and we don't wish ter know no more acquaintances then we hes at present got."

"Do you take the hint, or shell I call ther cap'n ter tell you jist who I is, and ter know what you wants with a lone widdy woman and her little deaf sonny?"

"We are wrong, Peg," said one of the men, turning away.

"I say no, Chum, though the boy does play it like an actor; come, I'll uncover 'em," and stepping forward he said sternly:

"Boy, I don't want any more nonsense, for I knows you, and the gal too."

"We is officers of the law, and you goes with us where we intends ter take yer, or we'll put ther bracelets onter you."

"Now what does yer say, wear these, or go quiet?" and the man held up a pair of handcuffs.

Nabob saw that they were caught, and that resistance would be useless, so he said quietly:

"Do not iron us, for we will go with you."

"Heaven have mercy!" groaned poor Flora, and then she sat down close to Nabob, while one of the men said:

"Chum, you stay here and watch 'em, while I go out and tell the cap'n to put us aboard the first fishing-smack he sights after daybreak."

"All right, Peg, I'll see that they stays right here," was the answer, and he remained on duty during the half-hour his comrade was gone.

When the man came back day had dawned, and he said briskly:

"There's a smack in sight, Chum, and the cap'n will put us on board and let us run to port, for I told him we was officers of the law and these prisoners must go right back."

In a little while the steamer lay to, and a fishing-smack came up close under her lee and the men sprung on board at the same time ordering Nabob and Flora, the latter almost in despair, the former as chipper as though he was going on a pleasure cruise.

"Skipper, we have some parties here to look after, and you can make far more money in taking us where we wish to go, than you can by fishing, so put away for this port," and the man handed the sailor a bit of paper, upon which some name was written, and the little sloop soon after stood away on a course to the northeast.

It was night when the sloop reached a small port, and one of the men landed and went on shore.

Flora was in the dingy cabin, getting what sleep she could, having changed her boy's costume for the dress worn by Nabob, for her own was the striped one of a felon.

Nabob had gone back into breeches, too, the better to be able to act, if need be, and those having them in charge seemed not to care.

The man who went on shore was gone fully an hour, and then he returned with a second boat containing two men.

A whispered talk was held between the two officers of the law, and then Flora was called up, good-by was said to the skipper of the sloop, and paid liberally, he sailed out to sea, both himself and crew of a negro and boy in a good humor.

But the boat that carried the party from the sloop did not land.

On the contrary it held along the shore for a short distance and then ran alongside of a small schooner, evidently a coast trader.

There were two men on board, but one of those coming in the boat was evidently the skipper, for he gave orders to at once get up sail, and being quickly obeyed the craft stood out of the harbor, and, to the amazement of Nabob and Flora, went again to sea.

During the following day the schooner ran into a small harbor, of a heavily-wooded island, some distance from the mainland, and dropping anchor a boat was sent ashore.

In that boat were the skipper, the two officers, Nabob and Flora.

Landing, the schooner's commander led the way to a group of several huts, and said:

"Here's the place, and there is no fear o' your being found here, mate."

"All right, my comrade here will remain with the boy and girl, while I return with you for orders."

"But you must send ashore the provisions I bought in the town."

"Oh, yes, them and the beddin' shall come ashore, now I know you is satisfied with the place," answered the skipper, and half an hour after the vessel sailed away, leaving Nabob and

Flora on the island, with the man known as Chum for their guard.

"I hope you won't stay long, Peg, for this are as lonely as a meetin'-house," called out Chum to his companion, who was on the deck of the little schooner.

"Soon as I knows just what to do, I'll be back," came the answer, as the little craft sailed away.

"Now you two has got to behave yourself, or I'll clap irons on you both," said Chum, as he turned to Nabob and Flora, who now felt sure they had fallen into the hands of villains and not officers of the law, as they had represented themselves.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FACING A CRIME.

FEELING that the one who had entered his home by night and robbed him of his money was none other than his vagabond brother Austin, Colonel Markham took no steps to hunt him down.

He seemed to feel that Austin had avenged himself for his treatment at the hands of Egbert on his visit to Markham Manor, and having gained a large sum would allow him to rest in peace.

To not even the servants did the colonel make known the amount of his loss, and they therefore had no idea that it was more than a few hundred dollars.

So the affair was passed over without much comment, and few in the neighborhood seemed to know of the midnight burglary at Markham Manor.

Egbert having gone to the Academy, Mercer and Edith amused themselves as best they could in their usual way, and Mrs. Markham calmly went about her duties, while the one who came to see her most often was Mary Marengo, and the strongest affection seemed to have grown up between the two.

Thus matters stood at Markham Manor after the departure of the cadet, and Colonel Markham again devoted himself to his books, his gun and sailing on the river, as was his wont to pass away time.

One day he had just come from a sail on the river and was landing when he saw a stranger standing in the boat-house awaiting him.

He did not remember to have seen the person before, but saw that he was gentlemanly-looking, and so returned his bow politely as he drew near him.

"Colonel Markham, I presume?" said the stranger, raising his hat.

"Yes, sir; and your name is—"

"Earl, sir; Mr. Earl."

"And how can I be of service to you, Mr. Earl, for you seem to have come here to see me, as I observe your saddle-horse awaiting yonder?"

"Yes, sir; I did ride up to see you, and a servant telling me at your house I would find you on the river, I came here to join you, for our business together I think can be soon transacted."

"As you please, sir; here in the boat-house or up at my home; but I am at a loss to know what business we can have together, Mr. Earl."

And Colonel Markham felt a trifle ill at ease beneath the earnest, penetrating eyes of his visitor.

"It shall soon be made known, sir."

"Ah! here are seats in the boat-house, and a table, and so we will be as well off here as in your library, perhaps better, for we are sure of no eavesdroppers near us."

"Is your business then of such deep importance, sir?"

"It is."

"Then pray be seated and let me know its nature, for you interest me."

"I feel that I shall interest you more, Colonel Markham; but now let me begin by asking you if you ever knew Randolph V. Randall?"

The colonel started in spite of his nerve, but said:

"Yes, I knew such a person."

"Where is he now?"

"Dead."

"And did you ever know Randal Victor?"

"Why do you come here to question me, sir, about dead men?" sternly asked the colonel.

"Ah, he is dead, too?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, my dear colonel, do not get angry, for I have authority for my questions, and I wish to ask you regarding the death of Mr. Randolph V. Randall."

"He shot himself by accident some time ago."

"I see; and the cause of Mr. Randal Victor's death?"

"Also an accident."

"Now, sir, were not these two one and the same man?"

The colonel winced, and after an instant, said:

"Prove to me that you have a right to question, and I will answer."

Mr. Earl calmly opened his coat, and revealed several badges thereon, while he said:

"I am a Secret Service officer, Colonel Markham, and I desire to make certain discoveries

regarding this man with two names, and it will be to your interest to tell me just what you know of him."

"I do not care to be brought into the matter, sir."

"I think there will be no reason for so doing, and I ask you to tell me what you know of the man in question?"

"In a word, sir, Randal Victor was an old friend of mine years ago, and he met with financial losses, and came near ending his own life."

"He was prevented, in fact, I prevented him from doing so, and gave him money to start anew."

"He decided to turn gambler, took the name, as such, of Randolph V. Randall, and was very successful, and it was believed was rich; but he shot himself by accident, and left little money."

"He was married?"

"Well, yes, he was married secretly, under one name, and left a child, which is now my ward."

"Alice Victor?"

"You know her then?"

"I have seen her; but where is his wife?"

"I know nothing about her."

"Well, colonel, did Mr. Victor leave to your care his fortune?"

"Yes, what little there was, for it pays interest to his daughter of about six hundred a year, and I add to that out of my private means for her education."

"Colonel Markham, did you not see your friend just before his death?"

"Yes."

"Did he not tell you where to find just three hundred thousand dollars in bank-notes, which he kept in a hiding-place, and added to as he won money?"

Colonel Markham turned very pale, and said angrily:

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Just what I say."

"He did not, sir."

"Now, colonel, it has not been so long back but that you can recall all the circumstances fully, and I wish you to listen to me and see if I do not know the facts in the case."

"I will have nothing more to say, sir, on the subject."

"Listen to me till I have my say, sir, I beg of you, so as to save trouble to yourself."

"Now this man was poor in early life, and somehow got a start of a few thousand dollars."

"He invested it and failed, and you helped him, and this investment and loss went on for some time, until one night he tried to commit suicide before you."

"You stopped him, for it would be most unpleasant to account for his death, as you had had high words together."

"Then you gave him more money and he went to gambling, and, strange to say, won largely."

"At last he met his death, it was said he accidentally shot himself; but this was not the case, as the bullet-wound that it was pretended to be, turned out to be a knife-thrust."

"But he had some good traits, this man, and he would not tell who had stabbed him, and let it be said he died by accidentally shooting himself."

"Before dying he asked you to become guardian of his wife and child, and he wrote a letter to the former, telling her that he had kept their marriage secret, as he knew of one who would kill them both if she knew it."

"That one he had bitterly deceived, and then deserted, and some time after his secret marriage she had followed him to New York."

"He had, to keep her quiet, told her he would inherit a large fortune, if it was not known he was married, and he entered into marriage vows with her, she believing them legal, and sent her back to her home to await his coming after her when he could do so."

"Thus he was deceiving her, and also his real wife, and living a dual life."

"But one day the woman he had basely deceived came to the city, tracked him, discovered his perfidy and sought him in his rooms, and she it was who gave him that wound, after which she went to her home."

"He had wronged her, and he would not tell on her, so died as stated, and before doing so, asked you to go to his real wife, and tell her all, keeping for her and their child the money that he left, but not to allow them to know it was won at the gaming-table."

"He made you guardian of the child, and of the estate, until the little Alice should arrive at age, when all was to be given equally to the mother and the maiden."

"This was but a verbal request while a written one given you simply said his child and effects were left to your keeping with full powers."

"Now, my dear colonel, that poor wife has never been acknowledged as such, and, as Randolph V. Randall married her under his real name, the marriage is legal, and she has now a right to assume it and claim his estate along with his daughter."

"In looking over your investments I find that several days after his death you invested,

in your own name, just three hundred thousand dollars in a certain enterprise that has paid handsomely, and an accumulation of some fifty thousand dollars more is the result."

"Then there is the money from the sale of the personal effects, and the little cash you said was left, which will amount to just fifteen thousand more."

"You made a sworn statement that our deceased friend left but fifteen thousand dollars, when he left in bank-notes three hundred thousand more."

"So, colonel, to save yourself trouble, I will ask you to draw up a paper giving the guardianship of the child Alice to her mother, and turning over to the widow also the entire sum left by Randolph Randall, with accumulated interest, and half to go to the little daughter upon her reaching the age of eighteen, as was her father's wish."

Colonel Markham's face had been as cold and hard as stone during the words of the man before him, and he had not once moved.

He saw that he had been cleverly trapped, and he knew not how, for he deemed that his secret was between the dead man and himself.

Then he asked hoarsely:

"And you make this charge against me at a venture?"

"No; for you gave out at first that little Alice was an heiress to a large fortune; but then you were tempted to keep it, as you saw a way to avoid detection, and did so."

"You forget that Mr. Randall had a valet, and one of that worthy's traits was to pretend to be very deaf, when he had the best ears in the world."

"He was, however, the best kind of a servant in all things, and this deafness was looked upon as a blessing by his master rather than otherwise, and so he heard all that was said when the wronged woman came and when you visited the dying man."

"That man pocketed some few thousands for himself, ran off, not caring what happened behind him, came back only a few days ago, and I met him on his way to see you and get a little cash by black-mail."

"A talk with him convinced him that I was a better friend than you would be, and so he is ready to swear against you."

"Great God! it was Toby!"

"Yes, that was his name, sir; but it is in my hands to arrange this matter satisfactorily, by your doing as I command you."

"And if I refuse, sir?" and the colonel's eyes flashed wickedly.

"Do you see these irons?" and Mr. Earl held up a pair of handcuffs.

The colonel became livid.

"What do you ask?" he groaned.

"That the child's guardianship be turned over to her mother, and that you give a transfer of that investment of the three hundred thousand dollars, with interest, to Mrs. Randall, and a check for the smaller amount, you admitted that the dead man left."

"When do you wish this?"

"At once."

"But the legality of it?"

"The transfer only needs your signature, as does also the check, while you can go to the Orphans' Court and assign your guardianship of the child."

"You will bind yourself that this shall go no further?"

"I will."

"And Toby?"

"Is in my pay, and I can place him in jail for theft, if he attempts any underhand work."

"You are a remarkable man to shadow me as you have."

"Shadowing rascals is my profession," was the cool reply, and Colonel Markham winced at the words.

Then up to the house they went together, and when Earl Chandos left Markham Manor, two hours after, he had in his possession papers that made his sister, never an acknowledged wife, a rich woman, while Alice, never allowed a brother's care and love, was to become really an heiress, and find in the end not only a brother, but an uncle, in the pretended French professor at Madam Holbrook's, who would be as a father to her.

"And it is through that mysterious old man, Captain Nero, that I have been enabled to do this," muttered Chandos, as he rode away from Markham Manor.

CHAPTER XL.

MASTER AND MAN.

SHORTLY before Egbert Markham had arrived at the village, on his way to the Academy, a stranger had put in an appearance at the tavern and asked for one Talbot, an artist.

"Mr. Talbot is out sketching, but will be in toward supper-time," the landlord had explained, and he wondered what so rough-looking a customer, as was the stranger, could wish with so trim a young man as his guest.

But then Mr. Talbot had the best room in the house, paid liberally for all he got, and asking no questions as to price, was asked no questions

on any subject himself by the attentive landlord.

Still the man who now called on him was rough-looking in the extreme, and Boniface wondered just who and what he was.

At last Mr. Talbot came home from his sketching.

As an artist he was very poor, and he was wise enough to keep his work out of sight, so got credit for being a great genius, who some day would win great fame by a masterpiece.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said Boniface, not desiring to call the artist's friend a man.

"Show him up," was the response, and soon after the visitor entered the room of Mr. Talbot.

"Is you Talbot the painter?" he asked gruffly.

"I am."

"You are a pal o' Cadet Markham?"

"We are friends; but what do you want?"

"He told me to come here and see you, if there was anything wanted."

"Well, who are you, and what do you want?"

"That's my business."

"Then go off and attend to it."

"But I wants to see him."

"He is not here."

"Where is he?"

"At his home."

"Where's that?"

"Now tell me what you want, and perhaps we can talk together?"

"Well, he got me to attend to a leetle job o' work for him, and I has done it."

"And you want money?"

"Kinder."

"What was the work?"

"I won't tell yer."

"Very well, Mr. Markham is at his home, above New York on the river; but I am expecting him at the Academy daily."

"I hain't time to wait—good-by," and the man was leaving the room, when Talbot called out:

"If he should come, who shall I tell him came to see him?"

"Peg."

"All right, good-by, Mr. Peg."

"Good-by, Paints," answered the visitor, and he left the room, mounted a horse he had hired at a village below, and rode away.

It was not long after that Egbert Markham came, and learning from Talbot just who had come, he started hastily after him, anxious to prevent his going to Markham Manor.

He found the fellow hiring the skipper of a little sloop to run him down to Markham Manor, and Peg came ashore, glad to be discovered by the object of his search.

"A few minutes more an' I'd 'a' been gone, sir," he said.

"Yes, I arrived at the village and followed you here, and was just in time."

"Where were you going?"

"To yer home."

"You should know better than go there."

"Business is got to be attended to, young master, and I has no time to fool."

"I went to the man you told me to, up at yonder village, and so I had to look you up."

"It is important then?"

"Well now it is."

"What have you done?"

"All I set out to do, and more besides."

"I am glad to hear this, so let us go to a room in the inn and have a talk."

"Better go on board the sloop, for rooms have ears, and the skipper has only himself, and we can send him ashore on an errand."

"All right," and the two boarded the sloop, the skipper was sent up to a store to purchase provisions, which Cadet Markham told him they would need, as he would get him to run them down to New York.

"Now, out with it, man," said Egbert Markham, anxious to know what there was to hear.

"Well, young master, we, that is Chum and me, went on the track o' thet youth, arter you told us the gal had writ you a letter sayin' she had writ the boy also whar she were."

"There we went, and we found thet the gal were really in prison, and so we started back, for we could hear nothing of the boy."

"Then it come to me thet we had found out only what ther girl had about told yer, and we had better go back and hunt up the boy, as he was most likely to be lyin' round thet prison somewhar."

"So we tuk ther boat back ag'in, and as we were landin' at ther dock near ther village, we seen a woman and a boy hurryin' aboard, and ther woman called ther boy Miss Flora."

"Thet struck me and Chum at once, and so we went on board ag'in, and we seen thet the pretended boy were a gal, fer she didn't play her part as peert as ther boy played the old woman."

"Well, young master, we struck 'em fer ther truth, told 'em we was law officers, arrested 'em, and got ther cap'n to put us off on a fishing smack, under pretense o' going back to ther prison with our prisoners."

"Ther boy then rigged out in his own clothes, and the gal went back into petticoats, while, believin' we was officers from the prison, thet youth told us how he had helped the gal to escape, and laughed at us about it."

"He also said it was wrong to accuse the gal, and she had friends who would soon get her out all right."

"Who did he mean?"

"Thet I don't know, young master."

"What did you do then?"

"Of course we couldn't go cruisin' around with prisoners we had no papers for, and so we decided to find a hidin'-place fer 'em until we could see you, and know just what you wanted done with 'em."

"So we run into a port by night, and I went ashore and found a cap'n of a schooner, who would run us to a island he knew was safe, for no one ever went thar, though once it had been inhabited."

"So he took us thar, and a neat bit o' land it were, and I landed with chum and the prisoners, seen 'em comfortable, for I had bought a outfit for 'em in the town, and then I came to see you."

"And they are there now?"

"They is."

"And your friend is their guard?"

"Fact."

"Is the boy in irons?"

"Lordy, no!"

"Then your friend had better look out for him."

"They can't leave the island; it is miles away from the mainland, and Chum hain't no fool."

"Now I have done the best I could, and I have had to spend all the money you give us for expenses, and for our pay, too, for I has not a fifty-dollar note left."

"What do you think is best to be done?"

"Is it important that they be kept out o' ther way?"

"Most important indeed."

"Better kill 'em then," was the perfectly cool suggestion.

The cadet shuddered, and the man, becoming master of the situation, continued:

"Now what are human life?"

"It goes out like a candle, and that's ther end."

"Now you is rich, good-lookin', and can enjoy life, and the gal has evidently got you into some scrape."

"So I says jist let her drink a leetle p'izen, quiet-like, and the boy, too, and I'll see they does it, and bury 'em decent on the island."

"Then me and Chum will weep o' their memory, and come away in the boat that I goes there in, for I goes alone this time, and nobody will know about it 'ceptin' us."

The cadet was silent, for he felt tempted, and yet did not wish to aid in a murder.

Still he must protect himself, and to do so must get Flora, and also Nabob, who knew her secret, out of the way.

With them dead he felt that he had naught to fear, for he forgot the man who was then becoming the master.

And forgetting, when again urged, he said:

"Well, do as you deem best, my man."

"Human life is valuable, young master."

"Ah! you mean you want good money?"

"I spent all you gave me in expenses."

"That was five hundred for you, three hundred for your ally, and four hundred for expenses?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I owe you twelve hundred on the past work?"

"Yes, that's it."

"And on the new?"

"The killin'?"

"Don't speak of it so; the putting them out of the way."

"Well, expenses will run up heavy, for I has to go back, hire a boat, buy p'izen, lay out the bodies, dig graves and bury 'em, and then get back with Chum to our startin'-point, so call it a thousand on this."

"It will not be over a hundred."

"Call it a thousand, young master."

"Granted, and as much more for your work."

"No; life is cheap, and yet it's dear, too, and to bury a secret one should pay well."

"I'll give you a couple of thousand, and you can pay your comrade what you please."

"Say, young master, I want just five thousand dollars for the work, and I'll pay expenses out of it and the amount you owe me besides."

"Now that's my price; no more, no less."

"I'll not give it."

"Then I'll put ther shadow detectives onto the little game."

"Ha! you threaten me?"

"Don't git mad, for it won't do no good."

"Does you say yes or no?"

Egbert Markham felt that there was no retreat for him then, and so he drew from his pocket a large roll of bills.

"Here are the twelve hundred I owe you, and here is half the other amount."

"Bring me proof of your work having been done and I'll pay you the balance."

"It's a bargain; but what proof do you wish thet I kin bring, young master?"

"Instead of burying them, drown them; cast their bodies upon the shore near Gloucester, let them be found, and a statement will be made in the papers, and I wish the papers containing the notices and descriptions of the dead."

"This will be proof, and you shall have the balance."

"Come to the village and notify me through Talbot, but let no one know what you have done."

"I'll keep as silent as death, and the work shall be done."

And the man went on his way, while the cadet started on his return to West Point

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RESIGNATION.

WHEN Egbert Markham had left the West Point Academy, on what was called a "special sick leave," he had been noted only as a very rapid youth, with plenty of money to spend, and one who enjoyed life to its fullest extent, as far as the rigid military laws allowed him to do so.

He stood high in his class, was a good soldier, never neglected a duty, but was proud to haughtiness, a martinet to those under him as a cadet officer, and any comrade of humble origin or poverty, he snubbed unmercifully.

With the professors, on account of his studies, he stood well, and his commandant had no cause to complain, for he knew not the under life of the young man.

Upon his going home Egbert Markham became very fast, openly gambled, got rooms in the city, furnished them with luxurious taste, and with a cook and valet lived like a prince.

He had met Mary Marengo, when she first came to Judge Garlo's as his ward, and became most attentive to her, intending to marry her, if he could get rid of Flora.

So it was he went rapidly to the bad, in a few short months, changing from a fast youth to one who sought to destroy poor Flora's record of marriage, and then hire an assassin to take her life, and the life of Nabob too, who he feared knew the secret.

He had pawned the necklace he had bought on credit, he had given his notes and jewelry to secure gambling debts, and, a married man, he was living the lie before the world of being engaged to Mary Marengo.

With all this on his conscience, he returned to West Point.

He went, from his meeting with the assassin he had hired, back to the inn where Talbot was stopping.

To his surprise he was told by the landlord that Mr. Talbot had had news a short while before that had called him away, and he did not say when he should return.

So Egbert passed the night at the inn, and went to the Academy the next morning to report for duty.

Hardly had he reached his quarters when an orderly came to him with word that the commandant desired to see him at once.

What he wished Egbert could not surmise, for that there was trouble he could not believe, as he had returned before his leave was out, and that was to his credit.

He promptly obeyed the order, however, and soon stood before the colonel in command, saluting politely, and then half advancing, as though to shake hands, for the officer had often been a guest at Markham Manor, and in the past had been most cordial in his greetings to the young cadet.

But the colonel was very austere in his manner, and said simply:

"Sit down a moment, Cadet Markham."

Egbert obeyed in silence, and with anxiety at what would follow.

Presently the commandant turned toward him and said:

"Cadet Markham, I have had the honor and pleasure of knowing your good father and lovely mother for many years, and it is on account of my sincere friendship for them that I now ask you to resign from West Point Military Academy as a cadet."

"Resign, sir?" said Egbert, with surprise, turning pale.

"Such are my wishes, sir."

"But I do not care to resign, sir, or at least until I graduate and receive my commission."

"I asked you to resign to save yourself the humiliation of a dismissal."

"I certainly do not comprehend, sir."

"You are willfully blind, sir, if you do not see that I give you an opportunity of resigning instead of being ignominiously dismissed."

"But why should I be dismissed, colonel?"

"I will give you a full bill of particulars, if so you will, young man, and you will then see how lenient I am not to drum you out of this Academy."

"The truth is I would do so, but for your parents, but I have given you a chance to retire with honor at least, though you have dishonored your position here and your name, and as you prefer dismissal, I will—"

"I beg pardon, sir, but I will at once tender my resignation," said Egbert, quickly, not knowing just what the commandant knew of his wrong-doings.

"Very well, Mr. Markham, hand in your resignation at once, I will approve it, and you shall have leave of absence until it is accepted by the Government."

"Now, sir, go to your quarters, and depart just as quickly as you can, and let me give you

a piece of advice, and that is that you have begun wrong in life, and at once mend your ways."

"To your father I will say nothing of my compelling you to resign, and you can tell him what you please."

"Had you preferred a course of honor to one of dishonor, a bright future was before you; but, as it is, I believe you will never be more than you now are—a scamp."

Egbert started at the withering words, but made no reply, saluted involuntarily, and left the commandant's quarters.

An hour after he left the Academy and wended his way to the village, scarcely bidding farewell to any one of his friends.

When he reached the inn he was glad to find there Talbot, who had just returned.

"Where have you been, Talbot?" he asked abruptly.

"To try and find you, for, after you left I thought of the man you had gone to overtake, and did not like his looks; but I missed you, so returned."

"You were good to keep an eye on me, and I'll not forget you."

"Are you painting any very rare work just now, that you would be pained to give up?"

"No, sir."

"I am glad; got any lady-love whom it will break your heart to leave?"

"There are several, sir; but the heart-breaking will be on their side," answered this very flippant valet.

"Very well, I return to the city to-day, bag and baggage, for my traps will soon be along from the Academy, as I have sent a wagon after them."

"Going to leave, sir?"

"I have left, for I offered my resignation an hour ago, and have leave of absence until it is accepted."

"The fact is, Talbot, I was not born for a soldier, and I like the ease of city life."

"Now you go right down to the city, purchase new furniture and carpets, get the rooms in order at once, hunt up the old cook we had before, and I will be down in a few days, for I must stop at home to allow the governor to lecture me upon having resigned."

"Yes, sir."

"Here is a thousand dollars, and spare no expense in the furniture."

"I'll get the best, sir," and leaving Talbot to receive his traps, when they came from the Academy, Egbert took a vehicle, drove down to a river town, and there hired a sail-boat to run him down to Markham Manor.

It was early in the afternoon when he walked upon the piazza, where his mother and father sat, chatting with Mary Marengo, who had ridden over on horseback, and was just thinking of starting home, when he was seen coming up the carriage drive from the river.

"Why, my son, what brings you back so soon?" cried his father when the greetings were over.

"The fact is, father, I am tired of a soldier's life, and I think I have it in me to make a name in the law."

"I had a talk with the commandant, and resigned, and I shall go to New York in a few days and study law."

"This is a remarkably sudden determination, Egbert," said his father.

"Yes, I did it on impulse; but it is done now, and I can only prove the wisdom of my act by showing that I can win a name as a legal luminary."

"Do you not think I can, Miss Mary?"

"From what I know of you, Mr. Markham, I should say the law is just what you need," was the reply, and Egbert flushed at the biting sarcasm of the remark, which neither the colonel or Mrs. Markham observed.

As Mary Marengo again rose to go, Egbert said:

"Permit me to order a horse and accompany you home— Ah! here come Mercer and Edith, and I will take the animal my brother is riding, which I observe is my own," and Egbert went to aid Edith from her saddle, and then lengthening the stirrup leathers that Mercer had ridden with, he said:

"Now, Miss Mary, I am at your service."

"Been expelled, brother Egbert?" asked Mercer.

"Oh, no, I resigned, Mercer."

"Couldn't stay away from Mary, I'll wager," said Edith.

"Yes, that is it; now, Miss Marengo," and he raised her lightly to her saddle, and then springing upon the back of his horse, the two rode rapidly away.

"So the commandant forced you to resign, Egbert Markham?" said Mary Marengo, quietly, as they drew their horses to a walk upon reaching the highway.

The young man's face flushed and then paled, while he asked:

"Forced me to resign, did you say, Miss Marengo?"

"Yes, those were my words."

"Why should he force me to resign?"

"As one unworthy a cadetship in the Military Academy," came the cutting response.

"Miss Marengo, I am really at a loss to understand you, or your words," he said, haughtily.

"Mr. Markham, let me prove my friendship for your good mother, by advising you to go West for your country's good."

"Your father is courteous, ever, yet he reminds me too much of you, for me to like him, and he does appear to me to be sincere—"

"Miss Marengo, I will not—"

"Hear me, for it will be better for you to do so."

"You are in financial trouble, I know; but you have brought all upon yourself, and, before the thunderbolt falls, I advise you to make a clean breast of it to your father, leave him to settle up your debts, and then go West, South, anywhere out of the reach of the law."

"Do you mean to say that I have committed a crime, that I should flee from the law's clutch?" he asked, savagely, though his face was livid with dread.

"I say just that," was the distinct response of the plucky girl.

CHAPTER XLII.

FACED BY FACTS.

EGBERT MARKHAM was in a quandary what to do or say, in response to Mary Markham's bold charge.

How could she, a girl, throw these accusations of crime in his face?

What did she know? What did she not know?

Such questions flashed through his mind.

Then he recalled the diamond necklace, and the mysterious manner in which she came in possession of it.

He must know all, for the suspense was maddening to him.

For a few moments neither spoke, and then Mary Marengo said:

"I have told you, Mr. Markham, my interest in you was for your mother's sake, for your father I do not like, Edith is haughty and ill-bred to all who are not her equal in wealth, Mercer is spoilt, and you are—well you are a very bad man."

"Have you proof of what you say, Miss Marengo?"

"Let us see, we are engaged, are we not, before the eyes of the world?"

"Well, I desire now to sever that engagement, for there is no longer any use to keep up the mockery, for I did what I did, made the request of you, hoping that you would change for the better."

"Don't misunderstand me, for I did not care for you; only I thought you might pay your debts, study hard, and, with the credit you gained, by being engaged to me, rescue yourself from all pecuniary embarrassments."

"You seem to know my affairs most intimately!" he said with a sneer.

"I do, more so than you believe, as you will see."

"Now I can forgive a man for being a little wild, but not for downright villainy."

"Miss Marengo!"

"Don't interrupt me, Mr. Markham, or you will seal my lips, and not learn what I know, and why I desire you to take the money you have with you, and seek other parts, perhaps it would be best to say another land."

"You are most complimentary."

"I am glad you think so, I am at least truthful; but I will say that I know you pretty well, and, as proof, I will charge you with being a gambler."

"Bah! all men play cards."

"Not all, and very few for money; but one I know of disguised himself as an old army officer, and played cards with his father, cheating him out of over five thousand dollars."

"Good God! who told you this?"

"I have a shadow, Mr. Markham, which is the same in sunlight, moonlight, candle-light and darkness, and my shadow follows you, instead of me."

"That is one act of yours, that you cannot deny."

"Another is, you gave your note, some money and a diamond ring, to close the mouth of the man who confronted you with this act."

"See! I have the ring," and she drew off her glove, displaying the identical ring he had given to Sly Steve.

He fairly groaned in his agony of woe, while she went on in the same clear-cut voice of sarcasm and contempt:

"Your next game of cards was with a young naval officer, and he won, after he forced you to give up cheating, and he has a note of yours, for a large sum, in which my name is mentioned."

"Do you recall it, sir?"

"Yes," he said huskily.

"Now again you desired to get money, and you went to a fashionable jeweler, where you were well known, and purchased nominally for me, a superb necklace of diamonds, which you know, and this you took to a loan office, disguising yourself to go there, and pledged to him for three thousand dollars less than you paid for it."

"You put the ticket away among some private papers; but had you not slept so soundly

that night, under the influence of drink, you would have seen a shadow enter your room and take it out."

"Ha! that accounts for your having the necklace."

"Who was this man?" cried Egbert fiercely.

"My good shadow it was, sir; but I did not done yet."

"The money you thus lost, as I have before said, you gambled away, and you were forced to sell out your furniture and other things, to leave New York with hands clean of petty, troublesome debts."

"But you did so, though you could not bring me my gift of the diamond necklace, and more, you had some hirelings to pay, and had no money to pay them with."

"Now this fretted you, for they were not men to trifle with, and so you came home to raise your credit by becoming engaged to Mary Marengo, the heiress."

"Then you intended going back to the Academy, to study hard, graduate, resign and live on my money."

"But these hirelings of yours wanted money, or would soon, and you had your valet living in the village, near West Point, pretending to be an artist, and he was under pay, and you felt that you must get it in some way."

"Fortune favored you, for your father received, through an agent, a very large sum unexpectedly, and—"

"Great God! are you a witch?" cried the horrified man.

"Oh, no, I am but a woman, but my shadow is a witch, to see and hear all it did."

"So you, while sitting with your father in his library, counting his money, pretended to see a face at the window, the face of a poor old man, a wanderer, a vagabond."

"But you saw no face, and said so to carry out your purpose."

"That purpose was to rob your father."

"You have no proof of this base accusation, Mary Marengo," fiercely said Egbert Markham.

"My shadow has," was the cool reply.

"Curse your shadow," he hissed.

She laughed lightly, and then resumed:

"You robbed your father, and he believed the old tramp had been the guilty one."

"But that is not all, for, upon going to your room that night you did not retire, but instead went to your stables, sprung upon a fleet horse, rode over to Judge Garlo's, slipped noiselessly on foot through the garden and reached the little piazza off of my rooms."

"You entered through the open window, for the night was warm, sought my locked dressing-case, unlocked it with a skeleton key, and took out the diamond necklace."

"Oh God, have mercy!" came in piteous accents from the man's lips, as he buried his face in his hands as he rode along.

"Did you stop then? Oh no! for you robbed me of other jewels, and a roll of money amounting to a few thousand, which Judge Garlo had that day paid me from some rentals."

"With this you left the room, while I lay awake and saw you enter and leave, uttering no word, and speaking to no one about it."

"This did not satisfy you, however, for you went home like the wind, and robbed your father."

"With the necklace, other jewelry and the money, you considered yourself quite rich and prepared to face anything."

"Now, Mr. Markham, do I know you as you are, or not?"

"You do," he said, hoarsely.

"And do you not think you had better depart from these scenes?"

"I will go to New York."

"Oh no, you must go further away, for shadows will hover about you as long as you remain here."

"I will trust in you not to betray me, for my mother's sake, try to redeem myself and remain in New York," he said, firmly, coming to a halt as they came to the gate leading into the Garlo mansion.

"And acknowledge poor Flora Hobart as your wife?"

He fairly reeled in the saddle at this question, so abrupt was it, so pointed.

"What know you of her?" he asked, savagely.

"I know that she is your wife."

"There is no proof of it."

"There is, in the leaf you tore from the register of the old church, the night that the shadow frightened you so."

"It is a lie, for I have the record," he cried, in the same savage way, forgetting how he betrayed himself.

"Indeed! your words admit then a marriage?"

He uttered a curse, but made no reply, and she continued:

"It is a copy of the record page that you have, stained, as though having been wet, and made to resemble it."

"The detective you sent was a shadowman, one of poor Flora Hobart's good shadows, and he played ghost as well, for he was shadowing you, when you went to the church."

"The register, Mr. Markham, is safe, with that missing leaf restored to it, so you are hemmed in upon all sides, and had best go West, before Flora, your wife, is found, for, if harm has befallen her, then no sympathy for your mother can save you, mark my words, and you will be shadowed to your grave."

She spoke most impressively, and with a cry of anguish, as though from the lips of a mortal in torment, he wheeled his horse and dashed away like the wind.

Then the color left the face of Mary Marengo, as she said aloud:

"What! can he really have married that unhappy girl?"

"His actions and wild flight would so indicate."

"No, no, I will not worry, for the shadow men have been too thorough in their work, he has been dogged too close to permit him to injure her, or to have his hirelings do so— Ah! there is company here," and as she rode up to the piazza steps to dismount, a tall, handsome young man, in the uniform of a captain in the United States Navy, came quickly forward to aid her.

"Donald!" she cried, in a glad voice, while he answered in equally joyous tones:

"Yes, Mary, I have come, and there must be no parting now."

"No, for the time is up to-day, for I am just twenty-one."

Just then Judge Garlo came around the piazza, and advancing toward him, her face flushed, and grasping the hand of the young officer, Mary Marengo said:

"My dear guardian, let me now tell you the secret of my life, and which my father never made known to you."

"This gentleman is Captain Donald Tayloe, of the United States Navy, and he is my husband."

"Your husband?" gasped her astonished guardian.

"Yes, sir, for when I was but sixteen, and he was not quite twenty-one we were married as a joke one night at a party, and the one who played clergyman had been just appointed a justice of the peace, so the marriage was legal."

"My father was angry at first, then said we were not to meet for years, not until my twentieth birthday, and then, if we loved each other we could be married by a clergyman, but if not, we could get a legal separation by mutual consent."

"He intended to tell you a secret, you remember, but died before he could do so."

"Now, Judge Garlo, my husband has come to claim me at your hands, for we have corresponded the year past, and are desperately in love with each other, and in fact, I believe we always were."

"I'll vouch for my love, judge," said the young captain.

"Then all I have to do is to give you my blessing, and turn over your heritage to your husband, Mary, and let me say it has greatly increased in my hands, instead of diminished; but what of that young cadet, Markham?"

"I have to explain to Donald about that, sir, and to you, too, for I entered into a pretended engagement with Mr. Markham, by the advice of a noted detective, who feared he meant to take flight, under financial pressure, unless he could become known as engaged to me."

"I am happy to say that Mr. Markham has just taken flight, and when you both hear my story, you will agree that it is unfortunate that he did not do so long before."

"But, judge, I'll leave Captain Tayloe in your care, while I go and dress for supper," and kissing her finger-tips to the two, the happy girl departed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

WHEN Nabob and Flora were left on the island, under the guardianship of the man, Chum, they seemed at first considerably taken aback.

They now understood fully that they were not in the hands of officers of the law, and, after some little thought, in his quiet way, Nabob said:

"Miss Flo', this is goin' to be a picnic fer us."

"How can it be, Nabob?"

"Now this are a very pretty bit of island; there are trees and grass, and flowers, hain't there?"

"Yes."

"And that spring water is as cold as ice?"

"Yes."

"Then that man as is gone left us plenty o' good grub?"

"Very true."

"And there's three little huts apiece fer us, if we want 'em?" and Nabob pointed to the half-score of little cabins.

"I see all this, Nabob."

"Next, we has plenty o' shells to gather, and we kin fish, and I kin build traps and catch birds, for see how many there are about in the trees?"

"Yes, it would be a pleasant abiding-place."

Nabob, under other circumstances; but my mind is so worried I can enjoy nothing."

"Don't git blue, for a short while ago you was behind iron bars, and then we thought the law had its grip on us, and now we is here, with a island to walk over, and only that man sitting smoking yonder, to keep guard over us."

"Yes, but what will come of all this?"

"Well, the first thing to do is to make ourselves comfortable, and I'll help you fix up your cabin, as if we expected to stay right along."

"Yes, Nabob."

"Then I'll rig out some little trick to play on that man, who thinks, 'cause he's got only a boy and a gal to deal with, and got 'em on a island, he won't have nothing to do but to smoke his pipe."

"Now we'll fix up the cabins," and just as they reached one, which Nabob selected as the best one for the young girl, Chum called out gruffly:

"What's you young-uns chinning about?"

"I was tellin' Miss Flo' we fix up her cabin fer her, and that this wasn't sich a bad place to stay after all."

"I guess not; it's a nice island, and when I can't live nowhar else I am coming here to hang out."

"I wouldn't mind staying here altogether," suggested Nabob.

"Waal, you want to do it, for you'll soon be behind prison walls, boy, just as soon as my pal gits back from headquarters."

"Is you going to take the lady back to prison?"

"In course we is."

"And me too?"

"Sart'in."

"Say, if we promised you a snug leetle sum o' money wouldn't you let us go?"

"Nary; but how much does you call a snug sum o' gold?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Bah! I gits two hundred and fifty and expenses for this job, with prospects of more when Peg gits back."

"I'll give you five hundred dollars, if you take us to New York."

"Where's the chink, lad?"

"I'll give it to you when we git there."

"Promises are birds in bushes; but money down are reality."

"I have got about seventy-five dollars with me."

"And I have a ring, which the matron of the prison allowed me to keep."

"It is worth over a hundred, I guess, and I will give that to you as security, though I will get Nabob to buy it back for me when we reach New York, for I would not part with it for any sum," said Flora coming forward.

"Let me see the money and ther ring."

Nabob took out his money, every dollar he had left, and handed it to the man to count.

"Seventy-three dollars; I thought you said seventy-five?" he growled.

"I thought there was seventy-five; count it again."

"I won't, for I don't make no mistakes; now, miss, let me see the ring."

"You'll let me buy it back, sir?"

"In course I will."

She handed it to him, a pretty little gem which Egbert Markham had given her when she became his wife.

"It hain't worth more than a hundred," he said, critically examining it.

"It is worth fully that much, sir."

"I will consider the matter and let you know."

"Why not decide now?" asked Nabob.

"Because I hain't able to do so."

"Give us back the money and ring until you do decide."

"No, I'll keep 'em until I make up my mind."

Nabob saw at a glance that the man meant to keep them, but he nodded to Flora to come away, while he said:

"All right, sir, and when you decide, we'll be yonder, fixing up the cabin."

Then he went to work, and with what blankets and things that had been left, he made Flora quite comfortable.

Then the young girl set to work to cook something for them to eat, and when ready they called the man to join them.

He had a voracious appetite, and more than did justice to what was before him, leaving but a limited supply for his young prisoners.

"Have you decided, sir?" asked Nabob, as the fellow was lighting his pipe.

"Yes."

"Then you will let us go to New York?" cried Flora, eagerly.

"Not much, for there is no boat to go in."

"I could make a raft with these cabin logs, sir, and go across with the tide," said Nabob.

"No, there's more money in my keeping you."

"Then give Miss Flo' back her ring, and I want my money."

"You'll not get ther ring or the money, boy, fer they is my leetle fee fer havin' to keep yer here," and the man laughed.

"You are a thief, that's what you are," cried Nabob, and quick as a flash the man turned and dealt him a stunning blow full in the face.

Nabob dropped as if killed, and Flora sprung to his side with a cry of alarm, while the inhuman wretch walked off with a laugh.

"Don't cry, Miss Flo', for it takes a hard knock to kill me, though he did make me see stars."

"But I know jist what he is now, and I shall act accordin'," and Nabob remained motionless.

"I feared he had killed you, Nabob," said Flora, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it; but just let him think I is bad hurt, and I'll play a game on him as will surprise him, fer I hain't as big a fool as I look."

"What would you do, Nabob?"

"He's got a pistol in his coat pocket hanging on yonder tree, and wears that knife in his belt."

"Now, you go and tell him you thinks I is bad hurt, and when he comes this way, you slip to his coat and git the pistol."

"Then you keep it until you kin give it to me; if we has the pistol, we kin tarn ther tables on him, Miss Flo'."

"All right, I will do as you say," and Flora pretended to be doing all she could to revive Nabob, for she saw that the man was watching them, and with some anxiety, as though he feared he had hurt the boy.

Then she arose, and walking hastily toward where Chum was sitting, smoking his pipe, and cried, anxiously:

"Oh, sir, I do think poor Nabob is dead."

"No! he's all right," he answered; but he seemed anxious, for he quickly arose.

"Go and see him, sir, and I'll get some water for him," and she started toward the spring, with a cup in her hand, while the man walked quickly toward where Nabob lay.

As she went along she glided near the tree, on which hung the coat, slipped her hand in the pocket, and drew out the pistol.

Then she hastened on to the spring, got the water and walked back to where Nabob lay, seemingly unconscious.

The man was trying hard to revive him, and Nabob was "playing possum" splendidly.

A bruise on the forehead showed where the fist had struck, and the man saw that it was swollen, and that he was greatly frightened, Flora could see.

"I'll carry him to the cabin," he said, and he raised Nabob in his arms and carried him into the cabin which the boy had been arranging for Flora.

"If you would get a bucket of sea-water, sir, to throw on him, it might do good," said Flora.

The man hastened away, and in an instant Nabob was on his feet, and Flora handed him the pistol.

"Now, Miss Flo', when I tackles him, you get the handcuffs out of his pocket, for he's got two pair there in his coat, and slip 'em on his wrists."

"I will, Nabob."

In a few moments the man came hastening back, with a bucket of water; but, just as he drew near the cabin, Nabob suddenly appeared in the doorway, a pistol leveled full at the heart of the amazed ruffian, who uttered a cry of terror and dropped the water.

"Jist stop right there, Chum, if you don't want me to kill yer."

"Now, Miss Flo', them irons, please."

"What the deuce does this mean, boy?" cried the man.

"It means business clean through, Chummie, for I hain't so badly hurted as you thought."

"Come, Miss Flo', for we want this man safe."

Flora had run to the man's coat, seized the handcuffs, and was returning with them, when the fellow, dropping his hand upon the knife in his belt, called out:

"Drop that weepion, boy, or I'll kill you!"

"You drop the knife, and quick, too," was the plucky response.

The man saw that he must take the risk of a shot from the boy, and suddenly he dropped low, and then bounded toward him, knife in hand.

But Nabob did not fire at random, as the fellow had hoped, but pulled trigger with good aim, just as his adversary was about to spring upon him.

A cry from Flora and a groan from the man almost mingled with the report of the pistol; but Nabob sprung forward, and was ready to fight to the death, when his enemy threw up his arms, the knife fell from his hand, and he dropped his length upon the ground.

"He's dead, Miss Flo'," said the boy, quietly.

"Oh, Nabob!"

"I couldn't help it, Miss Flo', indeed I couldn't, for he had to die, or we would have been at his mercy, and like as not he'd killed me."

"I am sorry, Miss Flo', awful sorry; but I shall bury him decint, and you kin say a prayer over him, for maybe he was a good man once, and then we can get away from here, and we'll get back our money and the ring, too."

Seeing that Nabob really seemed to feel the death of the man at his hands very much, Flora made the best of it, and the boy began to dig a grave over in the sand, as well as he could with the implements at hand.

Then the money and ring were taken from the man's pocket, and together they carried him

over to the grave, wrapped him in a blanket, and placed the body in it.

The Lord's Prayer was then said by Flora, as she stood at the head of the grave, and the young girl then sung a burial hymn, in a clear, beautiful voice, Nabob standing with bowed head uncovered the while, and with the tears rolling down his cheeks.

It was a strange, a touching scene, and one that those two never forgot.

Then the grave was filled in and the two turned away, Nabob going at once to work to make his raft.

But he was confronted with a difficulty he could not overcome, for the surf, slight as it was beat the logs back as fast as he drew them into the water, and he was forced to give up, saying resignedly:

"We must stay here, Miss Flo', until that man comes back."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A WOMAN'S MISSION.

CAPTAIN DONALD TAYLOR, the young naval officer, who had so promptly appeared upon the scene, to the day, to claim his wife, according to the terms of her father, showed in his face the gentleman, and a noble nature combined.

He had, soon after his arrival, driven with Judge Garlo, Miss Garlo, an old maid sister of the judge, and Mary Marengo, as she has been known, over to the village church, where the pastor performed the ceremony that made the two man and wife by the rites of the Christian service, in addition to the legal marriage years before by the justice of the peace, when, as it was supposed in a joke, they had been united.

The pastor was asked to keep the matter secret for a few days, as Mary Marengo wished to see Mrs. Markham the next day and explain all to her that it was possible for her to do, regarding her son, wounding her mother's love as little as possible.

The next morning as Captain Taylor was walking up and down the piazza, he saw a man approaching.

It was a man of strange appearance, one who did not look unlike the picture that Joseph Jefferson, the great actor, forms of Washington Irving's character of Rip Van Winkle.

With gray hair and beard, tattered clothing, and carrying a staff, the man approached the piazza, and politely bowed to the young officer, who halted in his walk and said pleasantly:

"Well, my good old gentleman, what can I do for you?"

"I have come, sir, to see Miss Marengo, if you will kindly tell her, sir."

"I will call her," and in a moment more Mary appeared.

"Why, is it you, Mr. —" and checking herself, she said:

"Come into the library, please, and you come too, Donald."

The three went into the library, and though surprised, the young officer wheeled up a comfortable chair for the old man, while Mary said:

"Now I can introduce you; Mr. Markham, this is my husband, Captain Taylor, who came but yesterday to claim me, for you know I told you of my little romance."

"I remember it, miss, or rather Mrs. Tayloe, and I wish you and your husband every happiness, and permit me to add that you have chosen wisely and well, for he who does not insult one in rags is an innate gentleman, and every inch a man."

"I thank you for your kind words, Mr. Markham; but I have seen many a noble man and woman in rags and distress," said the young officer.

"Mrs. Tayloe, I came to have a talk with you, for matters are coming to a climax now, and I am glad that your husband is here, that he may know the noble part you have played for me."

"Since I came to you and told my story of Egbert Markham's life, fearing that you would marry him, and thus bring a curse upon you, you have aided me greatly."

"I have tried to do all that I could, Mr. Markham."

"You have done much, madam, and the truth is, Captain Tayloe, I left my home twenty-five years ago, leaving my twin brother in possession of an inheritance of which I had every reason to believe I would get half."

"I left also a woman I deeply loved, for her father wished her to marry my brother, the heir, and not the pauper."

"I returned, after twenty-five years, as I said, in rags, as you see me now, to see what welcome I would receive."

"I was insulted by my brother's children as a vagabond, even after I was known, and by my brother also, though a ward of his, a lovely child, took my part, and suffered bitterly for it."

"I became revengeful, I fear, and knowing all was not right, I determined to carry out a work I had once begun, years before, and sift it to the end."

"I turned detective, gathered some good men and true about me, and with my band of shadowmen have accomplished much."

"I have shadowed every member of my brother's family, and their acts have been known to me.

"I shadowed the young girl who was my brother's ward, from her birth up, and discovered just who she was.

"I shadowed your beautiful wife here, and had my shadowmen upon Judge Garlo, her guardian.

"My shadowmen were at West Point, and every act of Cadet Markham was brought out, and his life has been revealed as black with infamy.

"Yesterday your wife revealed to him his career, as she knew it, explaining all particulars, and advised him to fly for safety.

"This was at my advice, for he could be sent to prison for his acts, and, if he has done an act which it is feared, and which my shadowmen are now unraveling, he may have to go to the gallows.

"If he has done this, which is nothing less than to hire men to commit murder, to assassinate his wife and a boy, one of my band, and whom we call the Boy Shadower, he shall hang for it, for though he fled this morning, one of my shadowmen went with him, to bring him back if he has added murder to his other crimes.

"And Mrs. Tayloe, permit me to ask you to receive this as a bridal gift from me.

"It has a history, captain, for it was purchased by Egbert Markham on credit, to raise cash on, was pawned, one of my shadowmen stole the redeem ticket from the cadet's room, I redeemed the necklace, and sent it to your wife, as a surprise to her pretended lover.

"It was stole from her jewel-box, by night, by Egbert Markham, and this morning pawned again, to one of my agents, and I thus got possession of it, and having also paid the jeweler for it, the necklace is mine, and I ask you to accept it as a souvenir, my dear madam!"

Captain Tayloe was astounded, to see a man in rags give such a present, but Mary said quickly:

"I thank you, Mr. Markham, and I accept it from you, with more than pleasure; but here is the ring you sent me also."

"Yes, and that belongs to little Alice Victor; it was her father's, and Egbert got it from her to wear and never returned it.

"Now she shall have it; but I have come to ask a favor of you, Mrs. Tayloe."

"Well, sir, I will do anything in my power."

"I wish you would go over to Markham Manor and ask Mrs. Markham to take a drive with you, going far enough to keep you away several hours.

"Edith and Mercer have gone to the city, and the colonel will be alone."

"I will go at once, sir."

"And then, if your husband will accompany you to the city I have another mission to ask you to perform."

"Certainly, I am at your service, Mr. Markham, and I know Donald is too."

"Willingly."

"It is that you go to New York and call upon Mrs. Harvey Hammond and break to her the news of her husband's perfidy, which I now will make known to you," and Austin Markham told of the life of Faxon Fairfield, and how his cousin had ruined his name and brought him to dishonor, sending him to prison for life.

All the story was told, up to his being cleverly shadowed and caught, and then, before half a dozen witnesses signing a paper of his being guilty of hiring a man to kill old Ezra Hammond.

The man's testimony also was taken, before witnesses and a notary, and then it was said the two escaped.

"But they were allowed to escape, I frankly confess it," added Austin Markham.

"Fairfield did not wish to see his cousin hanged, and so he cleared himself it was all he asked, and his inheritance he intends to share with the woman he loved, the one whom Harvey Hammond married, and who, through all, paid secretly the rent of her lover's studio, hoping some day to get him pardoned out.

"This is the noble woman I wish you to see, Mrs. Tayloe, and to tell her all, giving her these papers by which she can keep her home and enjoy a good income."

"I will do as you direct, and break the news as gently as possible."

"I well know that, and then there is another mission in the city."

"It is to go to Madam Holbrook's, see dear little Alice, who loves you so dearly, and tell her the story of her life in part, to show her that her mother yet lives.

"Then go to her mother, Mrs. Randall, and make known to her the story of her husband's life and that her child lives, and take Alice to her.

"These papers will give you the story of Randolph Victor Randall and show you that the fortune he left, and which Colonel Markham held, is in her name now."

"But I understood that Colonel Markham held only a few thousand in keeping for Alice, and this says nearly four hundred thousand dollars?"

"Yes; it was a mistake; he had her fortune

and transferred it," dryly said Austin Markham.

"Now, Mrs. Tayloe," he continued, "I have asked you to do much; but I feel that no one could do it better than you."

"Mrs. Randall is the sister of my lieutenant of shadowmen, Earl Chandos, whom you have often met, and he prefers that you should tell her and tell Alice the good news for each of them."

"To Mrs. Markham in her ride, I wish you would say that her son has gone West on account of financial troubles, of which you knew, and that you agreed to an engagement with him, hoping to help him out."

"Tell her frankly that his father could not help him out, as the colonel is a very poor man."

"But he is worth millions?"

"He is supposed to be; but I know he will be a very poor man in a few days."

"More I cannot say; but do not let Mrs. Markham know her son is a criminal, for it is best not, unless my shadowmen bring in word that he has caused his young wife and the boy, Nabob, to be slain, and he is equal to it, as you will feel when I tell you that he laid a plot to have the poor girl arrested in an Eastern State for theft, gave her a sachel, having an accomplice, a woman, to say she stole it, and, having bound her to secrecy about him and his marriage to her, he let her stand trial and go to prison."

"Infamous!" said Mary.

"That man deserves no mercy," sternly remarked Captain Tayloe.

"For himself, no; but for his mother, yes; but she was rescued from prison by that brave Boy Shadower of mine, and then the two were captured by men in young Markham's pay, for he found out that Nabob had received a letter from Flora and gone to aid her."

"Where they are now, I do not know; but my shadows are on their track, and if he has had the girl and boy killed, then not even his mother shall save him from the gallows," said Austin Markham, sternly.

"God grant that no wrong has been done."

"I sincerely hope not; but if there has he shall be brought back; but if not, he can go his way in peace, with the money he stole and got for the necklace."

"And my jewelry?"

"Pardon me, here are your trinkets, which I also bought in," and he handed to Mary a small box, which contained all that Egbert Markham had stolen.

"I had forgotten about these, but would have recalled the fact that I had them; but I suppose you know that the visit to the commandant at West Point, of one of my shadowers, forced Egbert to resign?"

"Oh yes, I was at Markham Manor when he returned, and stated he intended studying law."

"Now, Mrs. Tayloe, I will go my way, and keep in hiding until you drive out with Mrs. Markham, when I will make a visit upon the colonel," and soon after Austin Markham left the house and wended his way along the highway, staff in hand, like a vagabond of the road, while Mary drove over to Markham Manor, bound on carrying out the mission set for her to do.

CHAPTER XLV.

PHANTOMS OF THE PAST.

FROM a retreat in the woods, Austin Markham saw the Garlo carriage roll away, bearing in it Mrs. Markham and Mary Tayloe, from the Markham Manor.

Then he left his hiding-place and slowly walked toward the mansion.

Colonel Markham had helped the ladies into the carriage and then began to pace the piazza, his brow black, his lips compressed.

He had received a letter, sent by special messenger, from his son, telling him that Mary Marengo had broken her engagement with him, and that he had started off on a tour, with the intention of carving out his own way in life as he deemed best.

He bade farewell to all, and said he would return when he made a fortune.

This letter the colonel had shown to his wife, and it had distressed her greatly, and she was glad to have a talk with Mary Marengo, when she came over and asked her to drive with her.

But the colonel felt there was something behind the departure of Egbert, which he had not told, and he began to fear that all was not right, and had made up his mind to go to the city and see for himself, when his eyes fell upon the form of Austin Markham approaching.

Had he not been seen he would have hastened indoors and sent word he was not in.

But it was too late, and he calmly awaited, and asked sternly:

"Well, sir, what brings you here, after I have been good enough not to make your theft of the other night known to the constable?"

"Alfred, do not put on dignity toward me, for it ill-becomes you."

"Come into your library, for I have something to say to you."

Colonel Markham led the way.

"There are no eavesdroppers near?"

The colonel arose and closed all the doors near.

"Now, sir!"

"Alfred, I had reason to suspect that Uncle Grayhurst would divide his property equally between us, for when he had threatened to cut you off, on account of your fast life, I told him I would accept nothing unless it was an equal share between us."

"By the will you got all, excepting a few thousands, and I left home, and you stole my wife that was to have been too."

"There is no need of discussing this business, sir."

"There is, for I was hurt, and did not feel satisfied."

"The witnesses to the will were dead, and so I set to work to see if all was right."

"I found, Alfred, that you had skillfully changed that will, and—"

"It is an infamous lie!" yelled the colonel.

"I have all the proof, and more, I know that his will was just the reverse of what you made it, your name being placed for mine, only Austin being changed to Alfred, and vice versa."

"You lie! you lie!"

"I only wish that I did, Alfred, and in all else; but I know that you hired a man to kill poor Boatswain Joe Corbin that night upon the brig, and that the same man also shot Doctor Weed one night in his office, while the lawyer, Mr. Sykes, disappeared mysteriously, which meant your assassin pushed him off the steamer one night on his way up from New York."

Colonel Markham was livid as a corpse, and gasped for breath, while Austin Markham continued in his merciless way:

"These deaths, by the hand of your hired assassin, destroyed the witnesses of that will, who could explain about the names, and you paid hush-money to that murderer until a few years ago when he died in irons in the old Grayhurst Homestead, where you placed him in the secret room to starve to death."

"I have his confession, for he wrote it on the wall and signed it, as a witness, against you, and giving the name of his master, yourself, as the instigator and his murderer."

"Having begun life this way, by robbing me of my inheritance and my wife, by murder most foul, it is not to be wondered at that in after years you robbed the young girl placed in your charge by her father."

"See, I know all, for I am the chief of the shadowmen of New York."

"Good God! at last! at last!"

"I came to your home, in rags, to see how you and yours would receive me."

"You know well my reception, and that one, not of your blood, was my defender, and that poor Estelle, the wife of a robber and murderer, also befriended me against you and her children."

"That skeleton form in irons in the old homestead, the altered will, the writing on the wall, the robbing of Alice of her inheritance, all stand against you, Alfred Markham."

"Is it a wonder, with such a father, that your son Egbert is what he is?"

"Great God! what has he done?" groaned the man, who was colorless and trembling violently.

"He has gambled and cheated with marked cards."

"He has secretly married a young girl, stole into the church by night and tore out the leaf from the record containing his marriage notice."

"He has lived like a prince on money won by cheating at cards."

"He impersonated Major Boyd Hall, and cheated you at cards—"

"Oh, Heaven! have mercy!"

"He sent his young wife to prison to get rid of her, and now has hired assassins on her track and upon me who befriended her."

"He bought on credit a superb diamond necklace, pawned it, and squandered the money."

"He was forced to resign from West Point; to save you sorrow the commandant allowed this, and he stole by night into your library, after lying to you about seeing my face at that window, stole your money, and—"

"Oh, Heaven! be merciful!"

"And more, he got out of Miss Marengo just where she kept her jewels, and crept into her room, hiding there by night, and stole back the necklace, some money and jewelry."

"Now he has fled with your money, and you'll see him no more, unless my shadowmen bring word that he has murdered his wife and the boy, in which case he will hang."

"I do not, I will not believe it."

"I have proof, as I have of your foul acts, for his valet and his cook are my men, in my pay, and all he has done I know, as I do all of your crimes, for two of your servants are my shadowmen, and Miss Marengo herself I made a member of our league, though only two of us know that secret."

"Now, Alfred, there is but one thing for you to do, for when your noble wife returns, she will know that Egbert has fled on account of his debts, and that you are unable to help him, as you have been ruined by speculation."

"But—"

"She will not know of your crimes, she will not know of her son's crimes; but she will

know, being ruined, you will have to move out of your elegant home, to a little cottage I have bought for you, with plenty of land attached, and all in a pleasant abiding-place.

"This shall be your wife's, and, out of your wreck, you are supposed to save just enough to give you an income of a couple of thousand a year.

"Now, Alfred, you are to sign these papers, transferring to me every dollar of your property, and I give you the deeds of the cottage, and the order to draw so much monthly from the bank."

"I will not rob myself—"

"My dear brother, I am merciless.

"Come, sign these papers, for I have witnesses near," and he stepped to the window and made a signal.

"Who is with you?" eagerly cried Alfred Markham.

"Only those who will keep your secret, as to the speculations costing you your fortune."

"More they do not know, excepting my lieutenant, and he will ever keep silent.

"They will be here soon," and carriage-wheels were heard before the door, for Chandos, a village notary and Sly Steve, one of the shadowers, had been near in a vehicle, awaiting a signal from the chief.

"Compose yourself, Alfred, and bear up under this blow, for it would be worse to go to the gallows," sternly said Austin Markham, and before stepping to the door he suddenly divested himself of the huge bushy wig that he wore, along with the unkempt beard, his ragged outside coat and pantaloons, appearing well dressed, smooth-faced, stern and cynical-looking.

Throwing his disguise into a corner of the room, while his brother gazed in dumb amazement, he went to the door and met Earl Chandos and his party, introducing them to Colonel Markham, who, pale and quivering, bowed haughtily.

"Here are the papers, Mr. Notary, all ready for the colonel to sign, and you, gentlemen, to witness, so we will get through this matter at once.

"Here is a list of the property to be assigned, as stated in these deeds and bills of sale, and, Mr. Notary, please see that all is right."

"Yes, sir, all is regular; but I am sorry Colonel Markham finds it necessary to give up his entire fortune," said the good-hearted notary, little dreaming what the facts in the case were.

"It is sad, sir, but speculation has ruined many a man.

"Now, Mr. Notary, I will leave you, and this gentleman, Mr. Chandos, to await the return of Mrs. Markham, and get her signature to the papers also, to make all right.

"Then I will meet you in the village, where they will be entered.

"When do you think you can leave, Colonel Markham?"

"When do you desire it, sir?"

"Within ten days, and you will find your new home fully furnished.

"Good-by, sir, and should you wish to communicate with me, my address will be at the Astor House in New York," and, as the notary's back was turned, Austin Markham picked up his disguise and left the room, accompanied by Sly Steve.

As they turned out of the grounds, in their carriage, Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Tayloe drove in, and Austin Markham murmured aloud:

"Poor Estelle! but it is better so, better so."

Driving on to the village they sent the carriage back for Chandos and the notary, who soon joined them, with the papers all signed.

"How did she hear it?" anxiously asked Austin Markham.

"Like the brave woman she is.

"She had heard all from Mrs. Tayloe, and at once cheered her husband up, telling him that they were not poor after all, with a pretty little home, and many comforts."

"God bless her," was Austin Markham's remark, as he dashed his hand across his eyes, which had not before been moist in many a long year.

"It cuts that proud daughter and impertinent boy worse," continued Chandos, "for they returned while we was there, and I never saw persons more crushed."

"It will be a good lesson to them," was the stern response, and soon after, the papers being all right, the chief and his two men started for the city, the notary receiving a fee so liberal that, in spite of his sympathy for Colonel Markham, he was glad that he had lost his fortune, as far as he personally was concerned.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

No, kind reader, we have not forgotten brave Nabob and lovely Flora, and left them upon the island to die.

They were greatly distressed, when they saw their inability to leave the island, by means of a raft; but they did not despair of succor, and hoisted a signal that would be seen by some passing vessel.

But the island was out of the way, and no vessel came; but one morning Nabob spied a boat coming, as he was going to hoist the signal.

He at once notified Flora, and they got ready for action.

There was but one man in the boat, and he was at the tiller heading for the island.

"It is Peg, Miss Flo'," said Nabob.

"And alive?"

"Yes, so we don't care," and Nabob glanced at his pistol.

"Oh! will you have to kill him?"

"I hopes not, Miss Flo'; but I hopes more he won't kill us."

Soon the boat ran upon the beach, and Nabob called out:

"Here we are, Mr. Peg."

"Where is Chum?"

"He's here—meanin' yonder."

And Nabob uttered the first two words aloud, the last two in a low tone.

"Why don't he come to meet me?" called out Peg, as he advanced.

"He's asleep."

"That's lazy feller; but I'm glad you is safe, you and the gal, and arter I has had a talk with Chum I'll know what to do with yer both."

"Whar is he?"

"In yonder."

And as the man entered the cabin Nabob pushed him violently forward, at the same time giving him a blow, and seizing the door drew it to and made it fast quick as a flash.

The man fell, but springing to his feet sent a bullet crashing through the door with an oath.

"Nobody hurt!" sung out Nabob, and seizing Flora by the hand they ran like the wind toward the boat.

Springing into it they pushed off quickly, and Nabob seized the oars to get out of the surf, after which he raised sail, just as the man got out of the hut and came rushing down to the sea.

"No good now, Mr. Peg, for we is goin' on a cruise; but I'll not be mean, but send an officer after you," cried Nabob.

"There comes a boat now," said Flora, anxiously.

"Yes; and it contains three men.

"I wonder who they is?"

And Nabob saw that they were heading directly for them.

"It's Silas Springtrap in there I know, and the others I don't."

"But they is our folks, Miss Flo', so we is all right."

The boat soon came near, and Silas Springtrap called out:

"Bravo for you, Nabob, and I'm glad to see you."

"We shadowed that fellow here, and have got him."

"This is Lieutenant Fairfax, and this is Cadet Markham's valet, Talbot, who is one of us."

A warning look from Nabob checked him from saying more, for he saw that Flora yet did not know aught against her husband, though she had been led to regard him suspiciously by words of Nabob.

The three men then went ashore and Peg was captured and was recognized as an escaped convict, so while Silas Springtrap and Talbot took him back to prison Faxon Fairfield went on to New York with Flora and Nabob, for the Convict Detective, having cleared himself of the charge of crime, had, at the request of Austin Markham, taken the duty of finding the young wife and her boy protector.

Straight to the old wreck he took them, and there they were warmly welcomed by Austin Markham, no longer in his disguise as a tramp.

Then he told to Flora the story of her husband's crimes, and instead of sorrow at his perfidy, she felt joy at her escape from such a man.

Several days after Austin Markham went to Markham Manor, which had been deserted by the colonel and his family, who had gone to dwell in their humble but pleasant home purchased for them.

With Austin Markham went Nabob and Flora, whom he adopted as his children, telling them that he had made a vast fortune in foreign lands before he returned home, so had come as a tramp to see how he would be received.

And there met him at his home one pleasant day Captain and Mrs. Tayloe, the wife of Harvey Hammond, who was a fugitive murderer, Alice Victor and her happy mother, Faxon Fairfield, no longer with the stain of crime upon him, Nabob, dressed up like a gentleman, Flora, the deserted wife, and Earl Chandos, who, upon the resignation of Captain Nero, became Chief of the Shadowmen.

It was a pleasant gathering, but there were too many sad memories in the hearts of most of them to cause all to be perfectly happy, for Colonel Markham and his family were living in seclusion, Egbert was a fugitive in a foreign land, and Harvey Hammond was also wandering afar, branded as a murderer; but then, my good reader, there are skeletons in every closet, Haunted Heritages to be found in many hearts.

THE END.

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